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EVIDENCES

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION;

Briefly and plainly ſtated.

BY

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS little work was originally intended for the uſe of ſome young perſons, with whom I am connected. During a viſit I paid laſt year to THE BISHOP OF CHESTER (DR. PORTEUS) at his delightful parſonage at Hunton in Kent, I ſhowed his Lordſhip a ſketch of the firſt and ſecond chapter, and gave him a general account of what I meant to introduce in the ſequel. He ſaid that ſomething of this kind was much wanted; and that a comprehenſive view of the princi-

pal evidences of CHRISTIANITY, drawn up in ſuch a manner as to fix the attention without fatiguing it, might be highly uſeful in eſtabliſhing the religious principles of our youth, at their firſt entrance into the world. He was pleaſed to expreſs, in pretty ſtrong terms, his approbation of my whole plan, and of the execution, as far as he had ſeen it. He favoured me, both at that time, and afterwards, in the courſe of our correſpondence, with important hints for the management of ſome parts of the ſubject. And he deſired me to finiſh the performance as ſoon as poſſible, and ſend it to the preſs.

ON the ſtrength of this encouragement chiefly, I have ventured to make it publick. And to HIS LORDSHIP, AS A SMALL, BUT AFFECTIONATE, MEMORIAL OF THE FRIENDSHIP WITH WHICH HE HAS LONG HONOURED ME, AND TO WHICH I AM INDEBTED FOR SOME OF THE HAPPIEST DAYS OF MY LIFE, I BEG LEAVE TO INSCRIBE IT.

J. BEATTIE.

1786.

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INTRO-

INTRODUCTION.

THAT there is in the world, and that for more than ſeventeen hundred years there has been, a RELIGION called THE CHRISTIAN, will hardly be controverted: and that it muſt have derived its origin from ſome perſon or perſons, who introduced and taught it, ſeems to be equally certain, and will not be denied by thoſe who allow a cauſe to be neceſſary to the production of an effect.

THIS religion, ſay the Chriſtians, derives its origin from JESUS CHRIST; a perſon of unequalled wiſdom, unexampled goodneſs, and ſupernatual

power; who taught it to his diſciples, commanding them to preach it in all nations. This religion, ſays the infidel, admitting that Jeſus introduced it, derives its origin from impoſture and falſehood, and owes its continuance to the enthuſiaſm, the knavery, and the folly of mankind.

The tendency of this religion, ſay its enemies, is to darken and bewilder the underſtanding, to interrupt the pleaſures of life, to confound human affairs, to debaſe the mind by ſuperſtition, and to make men timorous and cruel. The tendency of this religion, ſay they who are better acquainted with it, is to enlighten the mind with true wiſdom; to baniſh ſuperſtition; to promote univerſal righteouſneſs, charity, and peace; to comfort

fort us in adverſity, and give proſperity its higheſt reliſh; to encourage the moſt tranſporting hopes, with full aſſurance that they will not be diſappointed; to repreſs every malevolent and every evil paſſion; to make men, whatever their outward circumſtances may be, reſigned and thankful; and, in a word, to promote their happineſs, both in time, and through all eternity.

OPINIONS ſo oppoſite cannot both be true; and they, who have the means of knowing the truth, ought to inquire on which ſide it lies. If this religion be from heaven, to be indifferent about it is inexcuſable, and muſt be dangerous. And no man is entitled to ſay, that it is not from heaven, till he have ſtudied its evidence and doc-

trines, and found the former inſufficient to ſatisfy a fair mind, and the latter unworthy of a divine original. To refuſe to believe, or inquire about this religion, becauſe one may have read or heard ſome things plauſibly written or ſaid againſt it, would be as uncandid, as to refuſe all information concerning my character, for example, except that which is known to have been given by my mortal enemy. Between the two caſes, however, there is this difference; and a very conſiderable one it ſeems to be. To the greater part of mankind it is a matter of no moment to be informed, whether I be honeſt, or the contrary, a man of ſenſe, or a fool. But if the Chriſtian religion be true, and that it is falſe has not yet been proved, it muſt be a matter of infinite concern to us

all, that it be accurately ſtudied and well underſtood.

In defence of Chriſtianity many excellent books have been written; by Grotius, Clarke, Locke, Lardner, Butler, Weſt, Lyttelton, Sherlock, and others, whoſe integrity and learning will not be called in queſtion. The deſign of this little work is, not to ſuperſede as unneceſſary, but to recommend, and ſerve as an introduction to, the peruſal of thoſe great authors; by ſhowing as plainly, and as briefly as I can, to every candid reader, and eſpecially to the young, that the evidence of this religion is at leaſt ſtrong enough to merit attention and deliberate inquiry. If I can accompliſh even this purpoſe, I ſhall do ſervice to a cauſe, which, as a friend to mankind,

I have always had very much at heart. For, from ſeveral converſations which it has been my chance to have with unbelievers, I have learned, that ignorance of the nature of our religion, and a diſinclination to ſtudy both it and its evidence, are to be reckoned among the chief cauſes of infidelity.

I HAVE ſometimes met with little practical treatiſes called *Ten minutes advice*—to thoſe who are about to engage in ſuch or ſuch an enterpriſe. Thoſe performances may have their uſe, though they ſhould not contain a full detail of the buſineſs alluded to. I mean to give *Two hours advice*—to that perſon, who may be in danger from the books, or from the company, of infidels, and is candid enough to deſire to be informed, in few words, whether

whether the evidence on the other ſide be ſo plauſible as to deſerve the notice of a rational mind. If I ſhall ſatisfy him that it is, he will naturally lay me aſide, and have recourſe, for further information, to thoſe authors who have gone through the whole ſubject, and illuſtrated and proved many things, which the narrowneſs of my plan permits me only to affirm, or perhaps only to hint at. And, which is far the moſt important part of the whole procedure, he will at the ſame time REVERENTLY CONSULT thoſe Sacred Oracles, which contain the hiſtory of Divine Revelation; and which he will find, more frequently, perhaps, and more fully, than he could have imagined, to carry their own evidence along with them. And when he has done all this, in the ſpirit of candour,

and with an humble and docile mind, and a ſincere deſire to know the truth and his duty, I may venture to aſſure him, that he will not regret the time he has employed in the ſtudy, and that from the writings or converſation of unbelievers his faith will never be in danger any more.

THE reader now ſees what is aimed at in this little book. If he think my pretenſions too high, or my hopes too ſanguine, he will allow, however, that, as the ſubject of a free government, I have an undoubted right (though a layman) to publiſh, whether they be attended to or not, the reaſons which have determined me to adhere to that religion wherein I had the happineſs to be educated.

CHAP. I.

REVELATION IS USEFUL AND NECESSARY.

THE evidence of the Chriſtian religion is a ſubject of great extent: all I purpoſe to do is, to give a ſummary view of it. I do not mean to produce proof for every one of the aſſertions I may make concerning matters of fact: for this would require a great deal of time. But knowing, that to the beſt cauſe every ſort of miſrepreſentation is injurious, I ſhall be careful to advance nothing as certain, but what does admit of proof, and has actually been proved by the learned authors,

authors, who have diſtinguiſhed themſelves on the ſide of truth in this controverſy.

THIS evidence has been divided into external and internal: the former ariſing from prophecy, miracles, and hiſtorical teſtimony; the latter, from the peculiar character, and intrinſick excellency of the Chriſtian religion. Some authors have enlarged chiefly on the one ſort of evidence, and ſome on the other; and ſome have been equally attentive to both. I ſhall ſpeak, firſt, of the external evidence, and, ſecondly, of the internal; though occaſionally perhaps, and in order to avoid prolixity and needleſs repetition, I may ſpeak of both at the ſame time.

THE

THE firſt thing to be enquired into is, the importance and uſefulneſs of Divine Revelation. For, if ſuch a thing be uſeful and important, and even neceſſary to man, it muſt be ſuitable to the Divine wiſdom and goodneſs to beſtow it.

1. IF man had perſevered in his primitive innocence; if human principles and practice had no influence on human happineſs, or on each other; and if ignorance, inattention, and prejudice, if ſuperſtition and ſenſuality, if ſavage life and ſanguinary paſſions, had no tendency to corrupt men's opinions, to pervert their reaſon, and to plunge them into guilt and wretchedneſs;— on theſe ſuppoſitions, I ſhould readily admit, that there is no need of revelation. But from daily experience, and from

from the hiſtory of men in all ages, it appears, that not one of the things now ſuppoſed is agreeable to fact.

THAT man did not perſevere in innocence, requires no proof. That corrupt principles and criminal practice lead to miſery, and truth and virtue to happineſs, is as evident, as that order is preferable to confuſion, ſecurity to danger, and a wiſe and good man to a barbarian or wild beaſt. That, even though our intentions be good, we muſt miſtake our duty, if we are ignorant of the nature of that being who is the object of it, will not be doubted by thoſe who have obſerved, that we muſt believe a man to be our parent or benefactor, before we can be ſenſible that we owe him the duty of gratitude or filial affection.

And

And that men's notions of all the objects of duty, of their Creator, their fellow-creatures, and themſelves, are liable to be perverted, and in every country unenlightened by revelation have been perverted, by the weakneſs of the human underſtanding, by the force of prejudice and paſſion, by vice, by inattention, by ſuperſtition, and by ignorance, the hiſtory of mankind proves to be a melancholy, but inconteſtable truth.

This being granted, it will follow, that a revelation, which rectifies and aſcertains men's notions of the ſeveral objects of duty, by explaining the nature of God and of man, and by informing their conſcience with reſpect to particular duties, muſt be highly important and beneficial; and muſt

even be neceſſary to the attainment of that degree of happineſs and virtue, whereof human nature appears to be ſuſceptible, and for which, therefore, we may preſume that man was made.

2. The character of the Supreme Being, and the nature and deſtination of man, muſt be very imperfectly known to thoſe who have received no poſitive information concerning the reality of a future ſtate, and its connection with the preſent. Now this is a point on which all the evidences collected by human reaſon, while unaided by divine light, amount to nothing higher than probable conjecture. But that better evidence, in ſo intereſting a matter, muſt be a deſirable thing, will be acknowledged by all men:—unleſs there be men who believe

lieve that a future ſtate is an abſolute impoſſibility. Revelation, therefore, ſeems to be neceſſary, to give ſuch evidence of another life, and ſuch intelligence concerning it, as may vindicate the divine goodneſs and wiſdom with reſpect to the conſtitution of the preſent; and ſuch as may alſo prove a comfort to good men, and a reſtraint on the paſſions of the wicked; and ſuch, moreover, as may ſerve for a ſolemn intimation to all men, that their behaviour in this ſtate of trial is to them a matter of infinite importance. That this laſt conſideration ſtrengthens morality, or promotes at leaſt the peace of ſociety, and, conſequently, the happineſs of mankind, ſeems to be admitted by the enemies as well as by the friends of religion. Elſe how can we account for that favourite notion

of

of the infidel, that religion was contrived, and is patroniſed, by politicians, in order to overawe the world, and make the paſſions of men more manageable?

3. REVELATION is further neceſſary, to explain on what terms we may hope for pardon, conſiſtently with the perfection of divine juſtice. Of the neceſſity of expiation for guilt, all mankind ſeem to have had an idea; as appears from the univerſal uſe of ſacrifices. But, from the multitude of the pagan expiatory rites; from the abſurdity of all, and the impiety of many of them; and eſpecially from the circumſtance of their conſulting oracles on the ſubject of atonement; we may warrantably infer, not only their ignorance of duty in this particular, but

alſo

alſo their conſciouſneſs of that ignorance. And ſome of their beſt philoſophers of the Socratic ſchool ſeemed to think, that, till God ſhould be pleaſed to reveal his will in an extraordinary manner, it would be impoſſible for man to know what religious ſervice would be moſt acceptable to him. To thoſe, who were ſo wiſe, and ſo candid, as to think and ſpeak in this manner, may we not preſume, that the Chriſtian doctrine of repentance and faith, if they had rightly underſtood it, and if they had known its evidence, would have been a moſt welcome diſcovery?

To our infidels, indeed, it is not welcome; for they ſay they have no need of it: being, it ſeems, fully ſatisfied, that, however ignorant Socra-

tes might confeſs himſelf to be, they have all the knowledge that man has occaſion for. And yet, if it had not been for this manifeſtation of divine grace and truth, they would, probably, at this day, have been conſulting oracles, offering incenſe to idols, or perhaps, like many of our remote forefathers, polluting the creation with human ſacrifices. Certain it is, that in theſe things no material reformation was ever introduced, or attempted, by the philoſophers of old. That men ſhould worſhip the gods, and perform the ſacrifices, and other rites, as by law eſtabliſhed, was the doctrine not of Pythagoras and Epictetus only, but of Cicero, a wiſer, or more learned man, at leaſt, than either, and even of Socrates himſelf, the wiſeſt of them all. So that, if philoſophy had been

man's only guide, it is probable, nay it is more than probable, that idolatry would at this day have been his religion.

4. REVELATION is yet further neceſſary, in order to make the whole of human duty not only *known*, but *obvious to all capacities*. The beſt heathen moraliſts acknowledged their ignorance in ſome points of duty; and their knowledge they had not power to enforce upon the common people, who, in ancient times, were very illiterate, having rarely acceſs to books, whereof there were then but few in the world. Though they had poſſeſſed ſuch power, and been all of the ſame mind, which was by no means the caſe; and though they had not been prompted, as moſt of them were, by

pride, vanity, or the ſpirit of contradiction, to introduce new ſyſtems, yet their labours could have but little effect. Such arguments as they had to offer, the greater part of mankind could not underſtand. For, in fact, the common people, in general, are not capable of perceiving the force of arguments, eſpecially when the reaſoning is complex, and relates to matters ſo remote from ſenſe as the truths of morality and religion. Of this ſome ancient lawgivers, as Minos of Crete, and Numa of Rome, were ſo ſenſible, that they thought it prudent to aſcribe to their inſtitutions a divine original, pretending that they received them from the gods.

I DO not mean to ſay, that the doctrines of the philoſophers, particularly of

of Socrates, and the better ſort of Stoicks, did no good. What Socrates taught, or rather conjectured, concerning the immortality of the ſoul; and what both he and the Stoicks delivered, though not always clearly or conſiſtently, with reſpect to the divine exiſtence, providence, omnipreſence, and omnipotence, was, no doubt, of uſe in diſſipating ſome of thoſe clouds of ſuperſtition and error which then overſhadowed the nations. But, as a ſyſtem of natural religion and moral duty, all antient philoſophy was very incomplete, as Socrates well knew; nor was it accompanied with evidence or authority ſufficient to raiſe the attention, or convince the underſtanding of any, except perhaps of a few ſpeculative men: and even they were inclined, as Lactantius, Cicero, and

Ariſtotle * teſtify, to make it a ſubject of declamation and diſpute, and a mere *tongue-exerciſe*, rather than a rule of life. Indeed, if we believe Laertius, who though neither an elegant nor a judicious writer, yet deſerves praiſe as a collector of anecdotes; nay, if we believe Cicero, to whoſe judgment more reſpect is due; we muſt alſo believe, that the greater part of thoſe, whom antiquity honoured with the name of philoſophers, were men of looſe principles and bad morals. Many of them diſgraced human reaſon by their profligate tenets and ſophiſtical wrangling; and ſome of them, by their impudence, buffoonery, and beaſtlineſs, were a diſgrace to human nature.

* Lactantius, iii. 15, 16. Cicero, Tuſc. Quaeſt. ii. 4. Ariſt. Ethic. ii. 3.

But, even from the beſt of them, what was to be expected in behalf of the common people, that is, of mankind? Socrates was the moſt popular, and, in all reſpects, the leaſt exceptionable teacher of heathen morality. He taught, that is, converſed in public as well as in private; and all who choſe it were permitted to attend him. But he never ſet himſelf up as a general reformer, nor did he pretend to more wiſdom than other men. And, as the charms of his converſation drew the chief men of Athens around him, we may preſume, that the common people, probably not very curious to know what he ſaid, would keep at a diſtance. Beſides, his peculiar way of reaſoning, by queſtion and anſwer, though as fair and ſatisfactory as can be, is better ſuited to the purpoſe of

inſtructing a ſmall circle of friends converſing familiarly and at leiſure, than of conveying knowledge to the common people.

ABOUT the common people the Stoicks gave themſelves no trouble, but ſeem to have conſidered them as little better than beaſts *. Some of their paradoxes would appear, from their extreme abſurdity, to have been contrived on purpoſe to exclude the herd of mankind from the ſublime myſteries of that philoſophy. And many of their tenets they wrapt up in ſtrange language (for they were very licentious in the uſe of words); and they ſo perplexed the human intellect by frivolous diſputation, that their

* See Mrs. Carter's learned and elegant Introduction to the Tranſlation of Arrian's Epictetus.

teaching

teaching could not be generally uſeful; nay, even to thoſe men of learning who had made it their ſtudy, it muſt have been in many particulars unintelligible. Cicero, indeed, in his book of moral duties, explained the practical part of their moral philoſophy, in a clear and elegant ſtyle; and, by ſo doing, enriched his native tongue with the beſt ſyſtem of Pagan morality extant. Yet ſtill it is an imperfect ſyſtem; and for a great part of it he was indebted, not to the Stoicks, whom, though he followed, he did not follow as a tranſlator, but to Plato, Ariſtotle, and his own good ſenſe.

THOUGH the Stoicks had been better qualified than they were for the office of publick teachers, the people would not have greatly profited by what

what they taught.—That external things are neither good nor evil; and that to be ſtretched on a rack, or to repoſe on a bed of roſes, are, to a wiſe man, matters of equal and abſolute indifference; is a tenet which the generality of mankind could hardly believe, and which, if they did believe it, was more likely to do them harm than good. For from this principle it would require no profound ſkill in logick (and the Stoicks were deep logicians) to infer, that by robbing a wiſe man of his money, cutting off his leg or arm, ſtealing his child, or murdering his friend, they only took that from him on which he ſet no value.—That men ought to be reſigned to the divine will, but that, when any thing vexed them, they had an undoubted right to make away with

them-

themſelves, after the example of Zeno, who in a pet hanged himſelf, becauſe he had hurt his finger *; would, to a man of plain ſenſe, appear neither very conſiſtent doctrine, nor very beneficial.—That the Deity is ſuperior to fate, and that fate is ſuperior to the Deity, is not more conſiſtent; and that the world is God, or at leaſt his body or ſubſtance, is an aphoriſm that throws no great light on the firſt principles of theology.—That the ſoul is immortal, is affirmed by Seneca; who alſo affirms that death is nothing, and reduces every thing to nothing, and that the tranquillity of the dead is the ſame with that of thoſe who are not born †.—That at death we return to the elements whence we came, and loſe

* Diogenes Laertius.

† De Conſolat. ad Marc. cap. 19.

all

all perſonal exiſtence; that there is no future puniſhment or reward, and that it is no matter whether there be any or not; are doctrines of the ſame ſchool, alike unfriendly to happineſs and to virtue.—That pity is unworthy of a wiſe man, is a ſtrange leſſon to inculcate on beings ſo frail as we are, who ſtand ſo much in need of the compaſſion and kindneſs of one another: yet this was taught by the followers of Zeno.—And that human ſouls are part of the divine eſſence, and that a man may become equal, and in ſome reſpects ſuperior, to the Deity:—Is this audacious and impious tenet likely to have any other effect than to cheriſh pride and preſumption ſo extravagant, as to harden the heart againſt every amiable affection, and make the underſtanding equally impatient

tient to hear, and incapable to receive, the dictates of true wiſdom?

In fact, notwithſtanding the morals of ſome of them, which I am not anxious to find fault with, and the beauty of many of their ſentiments, which I readily acknowledge, I am in doubt, whether, as teachers of the common people, they would not have been as blind guides as even the Epicureans themſelves. The doctrines of the latter were downright atheiſm: and thoſe of the former plainly lead to it; as indeed every form of falſe philoſophy muſt do, that teaches men to think and ſpeak irreverently of the Supreme Being, and to deny a future ſtate of retribution. Of the Stoicks, therefore, Milton, who knew them well, ſpoke neither

neither raſhly nor too ſeverely, when he ſaid;

> Alas! what can they teach, and not miſlead,
> Ignorant of themſelves, of God much more?
> Much of the ſoul they talk, but all awry;
> And in themſelves ſeek virtue, and to themſelves
> All glory arrogate, to God give none.
>
> PARADISE REGAINED.

BUT, when the fulneſs of the time was come, THE TEACHER OF THE POOR did at laſt appear: not, like the Stoick, proud, hard-hearted, and diſputatious; but, like the Son of God, meek and unaffected, compaſſionate and lowly, divinely benevolent and divinely wiſe. 'Go,' ſaid he, to two of John's diſciples, who had come to aſk whether he was the Meſſiah, 'Go your way, and tell John 'what things ye have ſeen and heard; 'how

'how that the blind ſee, the lame walk,
'the lepers are cleanſed, the deaf hear,
'the dead are raiſed, *and* good tidings
'are preached to the poor.' All this had been foretold by the prophet Iſaiah; and in Jeſus the prophecy was fulfilled. And his doctrine was diſtinguiſhed from that of all other teachers, not only by its intrinſick excellence, and by thoſe mighty works that bore teſtimony to its truth, but alſo by its being in ſo peculiar a manner addreſſed to the poor, and ſuited to their capacity, and conſequently to that of all the reſt of mankind. His birth was announced, not to the great ones of the earth, but to ſhepherds. On poverty of ſpirit, or lowlineſs of mind, which is indeed the foundation of the Chriſtian character, he pronounced a particular benediction: his ſervants he

choſe

choſe from among the poor: and, by the eſtabliſhment of a church, he provided a perpetual ſucceſſion of miniſters, who ſhould preach the goſpel to the poor, and to all other ranks of men, to the end of the world. In conſequence of this moſt gracious diſpenſation, the meaneſt of the Chriſtian people, if it is not their own fault, may, in all ordinary caſes, learn juſter notions of virtue and vice, of God and man, of providence and a future ſtate, than the moſt learned philoſopher could ever attain in the days of paganiſm. Can theſe facts be denied? And in him who admits them is it poſſible that any doubts ſhould remain, concerning the uſefulneſs of divine revelation, or the infinite importance of that which is brought to light by the goſpel?

LET not then the infidel pretend, that human reaſon is alone ſufficient to diſcover the whole of man's duty, and eſtabliſh in the world a complete or comfortable ſyſtem of natural religion. For it is certain, that, even in the moſt polite nations, unaſſiſted reaſon never did this, and, in the opinion of Socrates, never could. And of barbarous nations it will not be ſaid, that their reaſon ever made important diſcoveries of any kind. And it deſerves particular notice, that what our infidels call natural religion, is in a great meaſure, as Rouſſeau himſelf acknowledges, derived from that very ſcripture, which they abſurdly and wickedly reject. I do not mean, that their ideas on this ſubject are acquired by an actual peruſal of holy writ. In this ſtudy it is to be feared that few or

none of them ever made great proficiency. Thoſe ideas they derive from impreſſions made on their minds in infancy and early youth; when, together with the humility and candour, it is probable they alſo had, what every Chriſtian muſt have, the teachableneſs, of little children. The writings too, and the converſation of Chriſtians, to which, in theſe parts of the world, they muſt ſometimes attend, may convey to them principles, which they admit as rational, though perhaps they might be inclined to overlook, if they knew them to be ſcriptural.

If revelation be ſo highly important, it is moſt ſuitable to the wiſdom and mercy of God to beſtow it; and ſome perſons even of the heathen,

then, particularly Socrates, were not without hope, that one time or other it would be beſtowed. So far was that great man from aſſerting the ſufficiency of his knowledge, with reſpect either to divine or to human things, that, though by no means a ſceptick, he uſed, through exceſs of modeſty, to ſay, that he knew nothing but his own ignorance. He taught, that the gods grant extraordinary communications of wiſdom to thoſe to whom they are propitious: and recommended it to his friends to have recourſe to oracles, and other religious rites, in order to obtain from heaven ſuch neceſſary or uſeful information as human reaſon was not of itſelf able to ſupply *. Indeed the oracles, divinations, and

* Xenoph. Memorab. lib. 1.

auguries, ſo much attended to by the pagan world, prove, as already hinted, their conſciouſneſs of their own ignorance, and of the need that mankind have of ſupernatural illumination.

Of their oracles we know little, and can affirm nothing but what partakes more or leſs of conjecture. That they were the contrivance of prieſt-craft, has been ſaid, and may in part be true. It has alſo been ſaid, that demons had a concern in them; and this no conſiderate perſon will affirm to be impoſſible. Perhaps they may have been permitted by Providence to keep up in the minds of men a ſenſe of the inſufficiency of human reaſon, and to make them think, as Socrates did, that divine revelation was, at leaſt, a deſirable thing. This is certain, that

Socrates

Socrates had faith in them; that, though ſome of their anſwers might eaſily be accounted for, others are rather extraordinary; that Providence did, for a time, permit them; and that, ſoon after the great revelation took place, they became univerſally ſilent. Theſe facts deſerve the attention of thoſe who reject the goſpel.

But, however deſirable revelation may be, and however beneficial, we muſt not have the preſumption to think that the Deity is *obliged* to beſtow it. For this we have no better reaſon than to ſuppoſe that he was obliged to create man at firſt; or that he is under any neceſſary determination, ariſing from the perfection of his nature, to make men archangels, or to make all men equal in rank or ſagacity. His diſ-

penſations of benevolence and grace are all gratuitous. We have nothing but what we have received from him, and what he might have with-held, without any imputation on his goodneſs, or any diminution of his eternal and unalterable felicity.

Nor is it poſſible for us to judge how far it may be conſiſtent with the views of his providence, to make this revelation univerſal. Its good effects may be ſo, though it is not univerſally known: for it teaches, that perſons who lived long before our Lord appeared on earth, and who never heard of his name, may be ſaved by his merits.

This being admitted, no concluſion unfavourable to Chriſtianity can be drawn from the circumſtance of its being

being known in ſome parts only of the world, and not known till four thouſand years after the creation. For if it had been known one thouſand, or three thouſand years ſooner, a captious mind might ſtill aſk, why it was not earlier, and coeval with mankind, or at leaſt with the fall. Whatever concerns man muſt have a beginning; and that Being who governs the univerſe, who alone perfectly knows his own counſels, and who ſees at once the paſt, the preſent, and the future, can alone determine *when* any particular diſpenſation of Providence ought to begin; how quick or how ſlow it ought to be in its progreſs; and when it is to be completed. Many diſcoveries, beneficial to mankind, have been made in modern times. How abſurd would it be to ſuppoſe the recency of

a diſcovery an argument againſt its uſefulneſs; or againſt the goodneſs of God in giving man the power of making it now, rather than at an earlier period? Every thing here is progreſſive. If at once, and in the beginning, man had received all the good things that a gracious Creator had deſtined for him, this life could not have been a ſtate of probation; and we, having no deſires ungratified, no faculties unimproved, and nothing further to hope or to fear, muſt have been equally incapable of activity and of happineſs.

CHAP. II.

THE GOSPEL HISTORY IS TRUE.

THE goſpel hiſtory being conveyed to us in writing, the only poſſible way in which it could be ſafely conveyed through the long ſucceſſion of ſeventeen hundred years, its evidences muſt, in part, depend on human teſtimony. In ſome reſpects, however, they are peculiar, and differ materially from thoſe of other hiſtories. No circumſtance of the life of Julius Cæſar; the battle of Pharſalia, for example, the deſtruction of the Nervii, or the invaſion

invaſion of Britain; is alluded to, ſo far as I know, in any writing previous to the birth of that commander: but many of the facts recorded in the goſpel, though ſeemingly of far leſs magnitude, bear a ſtriking reſemblance to events foretold by Jewiſh prophets, who lived ſeveral hundred years before the birth of Chriſt. The particulars of Cæſar's life, the ſpeeches he made, and the great tranſactions he was engaged in, made no material alteration, except perhaps for the worſe, in the manners or ſentiments of mankind. But the things that were done, and the doctrines that were taught, by the ſuppoſed ſon of a carpenter of Judea, and by ſome fiſhermen his friends, produced a moſt important change, for the better, in human ſentiments and manners; a change diffuſed through many

many nations, and of which we at this day ſee and feel the conſequences.

THE evidences of the goſpel, therefore, are to be treated very differently from thoſe of other hiſtorical records. I ſhall firſt conſider it, merely as a portion of ancient hiſtory. Secondly, I ſhall ſpeak of it as the accompliſhment of certain prophecies. And I ſhall afterwards inquire, whether it may not be further confirmed, by the peculiar excellency of the knowledge we derive from it, as well as by the extraordinary changes introduced by it into the ſyſtem of human affairs.

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SECTION I.

The Goſpel conſidered as a portion of ancient hiſtory.

As a ſhort preface to what I have to ſay on the evidence of the goſpel, conſidered as a portion of ancient hiſtory, it may be proper to ſet down the following remarks on teſtimony.

It is natural for man to ſpeak as he thinks; and it is eaſy too, like walking forward. One may walk backward or ſideways; but it is uneaſy, and a ſort of force upon nature: and the ſame thing is true of ſpeaking or declaring

declaring what is contrary to one's belief. At leaſt this is the general rule. Long practice in falſehood, or in walking ſideways or backward, may no doubt render it eaſy; but it requires long practice to make it ſo.

We naturally believe what others tell us. We truſt the word of a man of whoſe honeſty we have had experience; but we alſo credit teſtimony previous to experience: for children who have leaſt experience are moſt credulous. It is from having experienced the diſhoneſty of men, and the motives that tempt them to falſify, that we come to diſtruſt or diſbelieve what they ſay.

In general, when we doubt a man's word, we have always one or other of theſe

theſe four reaſons for it: we think, that what he ſays is incredible or improbable; or that there is ſome temptation or motive which inclines him in the preſent caſe to violate truth; or that he is not a competent judge of the matter wherein he gives teſtimony; or perhaps we doubt his veracity now, becauſe we have known him to be a deceiver formerly. If we have no reaſon to diſtruſt his integrity; if we think him a competent judge of that which he affirms; if we know of no motive of vanity or intereſt that might incline him to falſify; and if he affirm nothing but what is credible and probable, we ſhall without ſcruple acquieſce in his declaration.

Our faith in teſtimony often riſes to abſolute certainty. That there are ſuch

ſuch towns as Conſtantinople and Smyrna, and ſuch countries as Aſia, Africa, and America; that Cæſar and Annibal were real men and great commanders, the one a Roman, the other a Carthaginian; that William of Normandy conquered England; that Charles I. was beheaded, &c.—every perſon, who knows any thing of hiſtory, accounts himſelf abſolutely certain. For the teſtimonies that confirm theſe and the like truths are ſo many, ſo various, and ſo conſiſtent, that we juſtly think it *impoſſible* they ſhould be fictitious.

When a number of perſons, not acting in concert, having no intereſt to conceal what is true or affirm what is falſe, and competent judges of what they teſtify, concur in making the ſame report,

report, it would be thought madneſs to diſbelieve them. Even when three, or when two witneſſes, ſeparately examined, and who have had no opportunity to contrive a plan before-hand, agree in their declaration, we believe them, though we have had no experience of their veracity; becauſe we know, that in ſuch a caſe their teſtimonies would not be uniform, if they were not true.—In this way, men have judged in all ages; and upon this principle the moſt important queſtions relating to life and property are decided: and of ſuch deciſions and judgments the general experience of mankind proves the utility and the rectitude.

An impoſſible fact no teſtimony whatever, not even that of our own

ſenſes, would make us believe. If I were to ſee the ſame individual man double, or in two places at the ſame time, I ſhould certainly think, not that it was ſo, but that ſomething was wrong in my ſight, or that the appearance might be owing to ſome peculiarity in the medium through which I ſaw it. When a fact is poſſible, and ſtill more when it is not improbable, the teſtimony of a ſtranger would incline us to believe, unleſs we had reaſon to ſuſpect him of a deſign to impoſe upon us.

Miraculous facts are not to be ranked with impoſſibilities. There was a time, when the matter that compoſes my body was as void of life, as it will be when it ſhall have lain twenty years in the grave; when the elementary

particles, whereof my eye is made up, could no more enable a percipient being to ſee, than they can now enable one to ſpeak; and when that which forms the ſubſtance of this hand was as inert as a ſtone. Yet now, by the goodneſs of the Creator, the firſt lives, the laſt moves, and by means of the ſecond I perceive light and colours. And if Almighty power can bring about all this gradually, by one particular ſucceſſion of cauſes and effects, may not the ſame power perform it in an inſtant, and by the operation of other cauſes to us unknown? Or will the atheiſt ſay (and none who believes in God can doubt the poſſibility of miracles) that he himſelf knows every poſſible cauſe that can operate in the production of any effect? Or is he certain

certain that there is no ſuch thing in the univerſe as Almighty power?

To raiſe a dead man to life; to cure blindneſs with a touch; to remove lameneſs, or any other bodily imperfection, by ſpeaking a word, are all miracles; but muſt all be as eaſy to the author of nature, or to any perſon commiſſioned by him for that purpoſe, as to give life to an embryo, make the eye an organ of ſight, or cauſe vegetables to revive in the ſpring. And therefore, if a perſon, declaring himſelf to be ſent of God, or inveſted with divine power, and ſaying and doing what is worthy of ſuch a commiſſion, ſhould perform miracles like theſe, mankind would have the beſt reaſon to believe, that his authority was really from heaven.

As the common people have neither time nor capacity for deep reaſoning; and as divine revelation of religion muſt be intended for all ſorts of men, the vulgar as well as the learned, the poor as well as the rich; it is neceſſary, that the evidence of ſuch a revelation ſhould be of that kind which may command general attention, and convince men of all ranks and characters, and ſhould therefore be level to every capacity. It would be eaſy, no doubt, for the Deity to convey his truths immediately to every man by inſpiration, ſo as to make inquiry unneceſſary and doubt impoſſible. But this would not be conſiſtent with man's free agency and moral probation; and this would be very unlike every other diſpenſation of Providence with reſpect to man, who, as he is endowed with rational

rational faculties, feels that he is under an obligation to uſe and improve them. This would be to make him love religion, and believe in it, without leaving it in his power to do otherwiſe: and ſuch faith, and ſuch love, would be no mark of either a good diſpoſition or a bad.—Now there is no kind of evidence, conſiſtent with our moral probation and free agency, that is likely to command univerſal attention, and carry full conviction in religious matters to men of all ranks and capacities, except the evidence ariſing from miracles, or ſupernatural events.

One author has indeed affirmed, that miracles can be no evidence of any doctrine; becauſe no teſtimony whatever can, in his opinion, render a miracle credible even in the loweſt de-

gree. But I need not quit the tract of my argument, for the ſake of a paradox, ſo contrary to the natural dictates of rationality, and which has been unanſwerably confuted by Dr. Campbell in his *Diſſertation on Miracles*. In fact, every event admits of proof from human teſtimony, which it is poſſible for a ſufficient number of competent witneſſes to ſee and to hear.

Some things may ſeem to be ſupernatural, which are really not ſo: ſuch are the tricks of the jugler; whereof when we are told the contrivance, we are ſurpriſed to find it ſo eaſy, and almoſt aſhamed of having ever wondered at it. Some other things appear ſupernatural to thoſe only who are ignorant of their cauſes: and ſuch are many facts in electricity, magnetiſm, and

and other parts of experimental philoſophy.

But the mighty works of our Saviour are quite of a different kind. To raiſe the dead to life, to cure the moſt violent diſeaſe by ſpeaking a word, to walk on the ſurface of a ſtormy ſea:—theſe, and many other things recorded in the goſpel, are truly miraculous; and ſuch as, to human apprehenſion, that power only can perform, which, having eſtabliſhed the courſe of nature, is alone able to change it.

Of this ſort of miracles the author of our religion not only wrought many, but alſo imparted to his apoſtles the power of doing the ſame. And, what was ſtill more wonderful, if any thing could be more ſo, he himſelf, after

having been crucified, in the preſence of a great multitude, and pierced with a lance, and found to be dead, and after lying part of three days in the grave, roſe to life, re-animated that body which had been mangled on the croſs, paſſed forty days on earth after his reſurrection, during which time he frequently converſed with his diſciples, and at laſt, in open day, and while he was ſpeaking to them, viſibly aſcended from the earth, till a cloud received him out of their ſight. Theſe miracles tranſcend all power but what is divine. So that, if we admit the goſpel hiſtory to be true, we muſt believe, beyond a poſſibility of doubt, that our Lord was, what he declared himſelf to be, a perſon inveſted with divine power, and employed in a divine miſſion. The truth

truth of the hiſtory may be proved from many conſiderations.

It might be proved from the exiſtence, and ſingular nature, of the religion of Jeſus. On the ſuppoſition that the goſpel is true, the peculiar character of this religion, its preſent ſtate, and the various revolutions it has undergone, may be eaſily accounted for: on the contrary ſuppoſition, nothing in the whole compaſs of human affairs is more unaccountable, than the riſe and progreſs of Chriſtianity. Its hiſtory may be traced from the preſent age up to that of the apoſtles. Since that period, down to theſe times, ſo many writers ſpeak of this goſpel, and concur in ſo many particulars concerning it, that there is not perhaps any other ancient record, for whoſe

whoſe authenticity ſo many vouchers could be produced. And we know for certain, that many intelligent perſons of the primitive church, who had the beſt opportunities of knowing the truth of this matter, and whoſe ſupreme concern it was to inquire into it, and not ſuffer themſelves to be miſtaken, believed and aſſerted the truth of the goſpel, and ſuffered death in confirmation of their faith and teſtimony. Can any thing like this be urged in favour of Xenophon, Salluſt, or Tacitus; whoſe authority, notwithſtanding the world is not much inclined, and in general has no great reaſon, to call in queſtion?

HAD the evangeliſts written the hiſtory, and the apoſtles preached the doctrines of a man who lived before they

they were born, or whom neither they nor their contemporaries had ever ſeen, their teſtimony would not perhaps have been above ſuſpicion. But I ſhall not miſrepreſent the circumſtances, or the conduct of thoſe extraordinary teachers, if I ſuppoſe them to have addreſſed their countrymen the Jews, who were the firſt hearers of the goſpel, in words like theſe: 'We tell you of this 'man, our divine maſter, many things 'which ye yourſelves know to be true; 'and nothing, in regard to which ye 'may not, if ye candidly inquire, ſa-'tisfy yourſelves by the teſtimony of 'creditable witneſſes who heard and 'ſaw what we affirm. From perſiſting 'in falſehood we have nothing to hope; 'and ye in detecting it can have nothing 'to fear. The power of the ſtate is in 'your hands: exert yourſelves to the 'utmoſt;

'utmoſt; and confute us if ye can.' Suppoſe an addreſs of this kind to be made to the French nation, concerning a hiſtory of certain well-known events that had happened in France; and ſuppoſe the only anſwer returned by public authority to be as follows: 'On the 'ſubject ye mention we command you 'and your adherents to be ſilent on 'pain of death:'—of which party, let me aſk, would the world judge moſt favourably? Would it not be ſaid, that nothing could be more fair, than what is declared on the one ſide; and that on the other there at once appeared invincible prejudice and implacable malignity?

But what motives could thoſe Jews have to wiſh the goſpel might be falſe, and to ſhut their eyes againſt the light with

with ſo much obſtinacy and perſeverance? Motives they had of the moſt cogent nature; motives, which among any people it might be difficult to prevail againſt, but which from the inherent perverſeneſs of the Jewiſh nation could hardly fail to derive inſurmountable ſtrength.

For firſt, if the Jewiſh rulers, after the death of our Lord, had acknowledged him to be the Meſſiah, they muſt alſo have acknowledged themſelves the perpetrators of the moſt dreadful crime that ever diſgraced a nation; and from rulers ſo haughty a confeſſion ſo humiliating could hardly be looked for. Nor ſecondly, was it to be expected, that they could bear to think of the abrogation of the law of Moſes, which had ſubſiſted ſo long;

which

which did ſo much honour to their nation, temple, and capital city; which taught them to conſider themſelves as God's peculiar people; and from which their prieſts, ſcribes, and elders, who we find were the moſt inveterate enemies of the new religion, derived ſo many dignities and emoluments.

THEY might alſo, thirdly, from many political conſiderations, be unwilling to receive the goſpel, and inclined to look on the men who taught it as the enemies of their country. For if the Meſſiah was now come, then all their flattering hopes of a glorious conqueror, who ſhould reſcue them from the Roman yoke, and exalt them above all nations, were at an end for ever. And then they might be apprehenſive, that the Romans, ſome of whom, as we learn

learn from Tacitus and Suetonius, knew that a triumphant deliverer from Judea was about this time expected, would be emboldened, on hearing that Rome had now nothing to fear from that quarter, to oppreſs them more rigorouſly, and even 'to take away' (as they themſelves emphatically expreſſed it) 'their place and nation*.' Whether the Romans were in any degree intimidated by what they had heard of the Jewiſh prophecies concerning the Meſſiah, is not known: but that they might be ſo, and had reaſon to be ſo, it was natural enough for a Jew to ſuppoſe; eſpecially if he knew, as he probably would know, that on the ſubject of prophecy the Romans were not a little ſuperſtitious. How much He-

* See John xi. 48.

rod dreaded the coming of the Meſſiah, appears from his murder of the innocents; an event which muſt have been well known at Rome; if it be true, as Macrobius relates, that Auguſtus, on hearing of it, and that one of Herod's ſons had ſuffered in the maſſacre, facetiouſly obſerved, that it was better to be the ſwine than the ſon * of Herod. Some however ſuppoſe, on the authority of Joſephus, that Herod had not then a ſon under two years of age; and that the emperor's ſarcaſm was more probably occaſioned by Herod's cruelty in putting to death Ariſtobulus and Alexander, his two ſons by Mariamne, and his ſon Antipater, for an alleged conſpiracy againſt his father's life. But this is of little importance in the preſent argument.

* ὑν ἢ υἱον.

In a word; if it be in the power of prejudice, of pride, of ambition, of religious zeal, or of national partiality, to make men averſe to the reception of any ſyſtem of opinions, we need not wonder at the obſtinacy of the Jewiſh rulers. Their paſſions, generally violent, were all in arms, and in the higheſt degree exaſperated, againſt Chriſt and his religion. That ſo many of that nation ſhould have been his diſciples, is therefore more wonderful, than that ſo many ſhould have oppoſed him. In modern times it cannot apparently be the intereſt of any, hardened ſinners excepted, that the goſpel ſhould not be true. Yet even in theſe days, and in the moſt enlightened nations, a ſpirit of oppoſition to the goſpel, and a want of candour with regard to its

doctrines and evidence, are by no means uncommon.

If ſuch was the temper of the rulers of the Jews; and if we may warrantably ſuſpect them to have been as capable of falſehood, as they certainly were of injuſtice and cruelty; is it not ſtrange that the events recorded in the goſpel were not denied by any contemporary authority? Yet this is the fact: for ſuch authorities, if they had ever appeared, muſt have been preſerved, and argued from by the enemies of the goſpel, and replied to in the writings of Chriſtians. And how is this fact to be accounted for? In no other way, I preſume, than by ſuppoſing, that in Judea the particulars of our Saviour's life were ſo well known, that no contradictory record would have obtained credit.

credit. And to publiſh ſuch a thing, without being able to make the nation believe it, would have been an injury to their own cauſe. Their beſt policy therefore was, to keep up the paſſions and prejudices of the people, to encourage a ſpirit of perſecution, to confine themſelves to violent and general aſſertions, and to avoid and diſcountenance minute inquiry. The truth is, that the ancient unbelievers never denied the miracles of Jeſus; they imputed them to magick or the power of the devil: a doctrine, which our Lord himſelf condeſcended to refute; and of which the modern infidel, as nobody now believes in magick, will not ſeek to avail himſelf.

But prejudice and paſſion ſubſide at laſt, and leave the mind at leiſure

for calm inveſtigation. If then the particulars of our Saviour's life had been as well known as is here ſuppoſed, muſt not the Jews, when the preſent ferment was over, have come to their ſenſes, and acknowledged the truth? That many of them did ſo, is certain. But from other hiſtories, as well as that of the Jews, we learn, that when the paſſions of men are thoroughly inflamed, by matters of great and general concern, it may require the operation of years to cool them. And let it be obſerved, that the Jews had not now much time left for reflection and leiſure. The generation that put our Lord to death had not paſſed away, when the troubles of Judea began; and in leſs than forty years after the crucifixion, Jeruſalem was levelled with the ground, the greater part of the

the nation exterminated, and the reſt ſcattered abroad throughout the Roman empire.

But, if their rulers were as much exaſperated againſt the new religion, as has been ſuppoſed, why, it may be aſked, did they not deſtroy it at once, by putting all the apoſtles to death? Stephen indeed they ſtoned in a tranſport of fury, and Herod murdered James the brother of John: but Peter, and Paul, and others, were permitted to live; and in a little time we find there was a church in Jeruſalem, and another in Antioch. How is this to be reconciled with what is ſaid above of the extreme obſtinacy and violence of the Jewiſh rulers?

It may be anſwered, that theſe things were ſo ordered by an overruling Providence, who, having determined that the religion of Chriſt ſhould not be deſtroyed, miraculouſly interpoſed for a time in the preſervation of his miniſters. If this anſwer be deemed inſufficient, the following conſiderations are ſubmitted to the reader.

First; The Jews could have no reaſon to hope, that, by putting to death all the apoſtles, or all the Chriſtians, that came in their way, they ſhould annihilate Chriſtianity: there might be others whom they had never heard of; for our Saviour, during his abode on earth, had many diſciples; five hundred are mentioned by St. Paul as witneſſes of his reſurrection; and on the day of Pentecoſt three thouſand were

were converted, and five thouſand a few days after.—Secondly; Peter and Paul, though for a time permitted to live, did not live in peace, but underwent cruel perſecution; and the former, if he had not by miracle eſcaped, would have been murdered by Herod, as James was.—Thirdly; Several of the apoſtles, ſoon after the deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt, left Jeruſalem, and went to preach elſewhere.—Fourthly; It may be preſumed that the Chriſtians of that age were quiet and inoffenſive; we know indeed for certain that they were ſo: and the rulers might be afraid to declare open war againſt them, as not knowing how numerous they might be; and dreading alſo, if they ſhould drive matters to extremity, the effects of that influence, which the apoſtles from time to time acquired

among the common people. The moſt oppreſſive tyrants, even when armed with abſolute authority, are not without fears of this kind: how much more timorous muſt a tyrannical ariſtocracy have been, that was deſtitute of mutual confidence, and over-awed by the Roman power!

To which I may add, fifthly, That the advice given by Gamaliel in the council, 'Refrain from theſe men, 'and let them alone; (for if this 'counſel or this work be of men, it 'will come to nought; but if it be of 'God, ye cannot overthrow it;) leſt 'haply ye be found even to fight 'againſt God:' I ſay, this advice had great weight with them; which indeed it deſerved to have, as a better could not have been given. The event has proved,

proved, that Gamaliel was a wiſe, as well as a pious man: and what was thus ſo ſeaſonably ſpoken to the firſt enemies of the goſpel, may with equal propriety be addreſſed to them who oppoſe it in theſe latter days.

In ancient writings, as there is nothing to invalidate the goſpel hiſtory, ſo there are ſeveral teſtimonies to confirm it. That Chriſt ſuffered under Pontius Pilate, and was the founder of the ſect of Chriſtians, is atteſted by Tacitus, and admitted, I think, by all writers on the ſubject. Facts recorded in the New Teſtament, concerning Herod, Pilate, Feſtus, and Felix, are mentioned by Joſephus, and in the Jewiſh Talmud. And the new ſtar that ſhone on the nativity, the earthquake

quake and preternatural darkneſs that accompanied the crucifixion, and the maſſacre of the innocents by Herod, are with ſome reaſon ſuppoſed to have been mentioned by pagan authors, as well as by the evangeliſts *. This, however, is not affirmed as certain; nor does any material part of the evidence depend upon it.

It is true, that the Roman writers of that time, both hiſtorians and philoſophers, ſeem to have been very ignorant of our Saviour's hiſtory and doctrine, and to have had no curioſity to know either. Is this wonderful? It will not appear ſo, to him who conſiders, the diſtance of Judea from

* See Grotius de Ver. Rel. Chriſt. lib. iii. 14. and Macrob. Sat. lib. ii. 4.

Rome,

Rome, and the ſtate of navigation in thoſe days; the contemptuous opinion which the Romans, the maſters of the world, entertained, both of the national character, and of the religion of the Jews; the proud ſpirit of the heathen philoſophy, ſo directly repugnant to that humble and docile diſpoſition, which is required of every diſciple of Chriſt; the extreme diſſimilitude between a practical religion, whoſe ſole aim is to purify the ſoul, and prepare it for heaven, and a philoſophy framed chiefly for the purpoſe of diſpute and rhetorical declamation; the mean condition, and unaſſuming manners, of the publiſhers of the goſpel, ſo unlike the pomp and pedantry of the Epicureans and the Stoicks: and above all, perhaps, that crucifixion, which the author of Chriſtianity was known to have

have undergone, and which his followers avowed and gloried in; but which, according to the modes of thinking that then univerſally prevailed through all the reſt of the Roman empire as well as in Judea, was a death of ſo much ignominy, that no perſon was thought likely to ſuffer it, who had, or deſerved to have, any reputation in the world. He who conſiders theſe things, and who knows the ſtate of learning at that time, the characters of thoſe who were reputed learned, and the real nature of the Chriſtian religion, may indeed wonder to hear that ſo many were converted to the faith; but will not wonder to find, that neither Seneca nor Epictetus, the elder nor the younger Pliny, Tacitus, nor Marcus Aurelius, were among the number. See this matter illuſtrated, with great pre-

ciſion and elegance, in the fourth chapter of Diſquiſitions (by Sir David Dalrymple) concerning the antiquities of the Chriſtian church *.

Some of the firſt Chriſtians, whoſe writings are ſtill extant, ſpeak of the goſpels as the work of thoſe evangeliſts whoſe names they bear. And they had good opportunities of information in this particular, as well as of comparing the goſpel hiſtory with the moſt authentick traditions concerning the perſons and events therein recorded: Origen, who was born in the ſecond century, being contemporary with Ireneus, who was the diſciple of Polycarp, who had been the diſciple of the apoſtle John, and perſonally acquainted with

* See alſo Biſhop Porteus's Sermons, Serm. x.

others

others of the early Chriſtians. Is it to be imagined, that thoſe men would not be inquiſitive about the truth of a religion, for which they had ground to believe, that they were likely to ſuffer perſecution and martyrdom? If we ſuppoſe ourſelves in their ſituation, with the ſame alarming view before us, and with the ſame means of knowledge they had, we ſhall ſee that it is not poſſible for a man of common underſtanding to do, and to ſuffer, what they did and ſuffered, unleſs he firmly believe the doctrine he maintains, and know that he has good reaſon to believe it.

To all this we may add, that the Epiſtles, which are of the ſame age with the hiſtorical part of the New Teſtament, appear evidently to have been written by men who were in earneſt

neſt in what they wrote, and to be adapted to real occurrences and circumſtances of the times.

THE ſtyle, too, of the goſpel bears intrinſick evidence of its truth. We find there no appearance of artifice or of party-ſpirit; no attempts to exaggerate on the one hand, or depreciate on the other; no remarks thrown in to anticipate objections; nothing of that caution, which never fails to diſtinguiſh the teſtimony of thoſe who are conſcious of impoſture; no endeavour to reconcile the reader's mind to what may be extraordinary in the narrative: all is fair, candid, and ſimple: the hiſtorians make no reflections of their own, but confine themſelves to matter of fact, that is, to what they heard

heard and ſaw; and honeſtly record their own miſtakes and faults, as well as the other particulars of the ſtory.

For a more full diſplay of ſome of theſe arguments, as well as for other things that might be mentioned on this head, the reader, till he have leiſure to peruſe more voluminous writings, may conſult Addiſon's ſhort but elegant Treatiſe of the Chriſtian religion. Whence it will appear, that the goſpel hiſtory is at leaſt as well vouched as any other of that time; and that, on the ground of human teſtimony alone, (without conſidering *at preſent* the divine authority of the ſacred writings,) we have as good reaſon to believe what the New Teſtament records of the birth, life, miracles, death and doctrine of Chriſt, as

as to believe the battle of Cannæ, the aſſaſſination of Julius Ceſar, or any other ancient fact. Nay, we have ſtill extant among us two viſible proofs, not hitherto mentioned, of the truth of the goſpel; I mean the two Sacraments; which are known to have been in the Chriſtian church from the beginning, and the origin of which it would not be eaſy to account for, on the ſuppoſition that the goſpel is not true. Theſe inſtitutions, beſide other excellent purpoſes which they ſerve, will continue to bear teſtimony to the truth of our religion, to the end of the world.

If it be ſaid, that the apoſtles might have invented what they record of theſe inſtitutions, as well as other particulars of the hiſtory; I ſhall only anſwer at preſent (for their veracity will be con-

ſidered hereafter), that two ſimple rites, which can afford no gratification to avarice, ambition, or ſenſuality, and whoſe chief end is to promote humility, piety, and purity of heart, could hardly have been the contrivance of men, who had determined, as thoſe who reject their teſtimony muſt believe, to live and die impoſtors and hypocrites. For the inſtitution of theſe rites is a matter in which they could not have been impoſed on. They could not have fancied, that they had received a commiſſion to baptize the nations, if they had received no ſuch commiſſion: they could not have believed that they were preſent at the celebration of the firſt ſupper, if they had not been preſent.

But are not thoſe parts of the Roman ſtory, above alluded to, more probable

probable in themſelves, than the goſpel hiſtory? Are not the former agreeable to the common courſe of human affairs; and is not the latter a recital of events, whereof many are extraordinary, and unlike any thing we have ever ſeen? Permit me to aſk in return, whether, if mankind were told, and prevailed on to believe, that a revelation of the Divine will was to be made from heaven, it would not be natural for them to expect ſomething extraordinary? Would they not have reaſon to ſay, 'God's thoughts are not 'our thoughts, neither are our ways 'his ways? As the heavens are higher 'than the earth, ſo are his ways higher 'than our ways, and his thoughts than 'our thoughts. This revelation, be-'ing a ſupernatural thing, will proba-'bly, nay muſt certainly, be attended

' with ſupernatural circumſtances.' In fact, the goſpel hiſtory, conſidered as the account of a divine revelation, is not leſs probable, than the Roman ſtory conſidered as a narrative of the works of men. From what we know of the weakneſs, wickedneſs, and other peculiarities of the human character, we admit the probability of what is recorded concerning Annibal and Ceſar; and from what we know, with equal certainty, of the wiſdom, power, and goodneſs of God, we admit the probability of the ſacred hiſtory. To our bodily eyes the Divine Eſſence and the human ſoul are equally inviſible: the nature of both we diſcover in their works; from which it is not more evident, that man is wicked and weak, than that God is wiſe, almighty, and good.

HAD there been nothing extraordinary in the life and doctrine of Jeſus, it would have ſupplied an argument of no little weight againſt his divine miſſion. This man, it might have been objected, gives out, that he is ſent of God, that he ſpeaks by inſpiration, and that his works are the works of divine power. And yet he does and ſays nothing but what an ordinary man might ſay and do; nor has any thing ever happened to him beyond the common occurrences of life. Why then ſhould we believe, that either his wiſdom or his power is ſuperiour to that of other men? To this objection, had it been founded in fact, it would not, I apprehend, have been eaſy to frame an anſwer. The ſupernatural events, therefore, recorded in the goſpel, unleſs they could be proved to be either

unworthy of God, or impoſſible in themſelves (which no perſon will ever affirm who knows what they are), will be found to add to its credibility; and that in the ſame proportion nearly, in which ſupernatural events, related of an ordinary man, would take away from the credit of the hiſtorian who ſhould relate them.

THE probability, that the goſpel may be true, is alſo inferred from the utter improbability that it ſhould be falſe. It is, as will be more particularly remarked in the ſequel, like nothing of human contrivance. The perfection of its morality tranſcends the beſt efforts of human wiſdom: the character of its Founder is far ſuperior to that of a mere man: and it will not be ſaid, that his apoſtles can be compared

to any other fiſhermen, or any other teachers, that ever were heard of. The views diſplayed in the goſpel, of the divine diſpenſations with reſpect to the human race, are ſuch as, before the commencement of our Saviour's miniſtry, had never entered into the mind of man. To believe all this to be a mere human fable, requires a degree of credulity, which in the ordinary affairs of life would do a man little credit: it is like believing, that a firſt-rate ſhip of war might have been the work and the invention of a child.

HAD the apoſtles intended an impoſture, there would not have been ſo many of them. Of twelve perſons employed in promulgating a fable, and wandering with that purpoſe into different parts of the earth, it is not to be

expected that, in defiance of perſecution and death, all would to the end perſevere in the ſame declaration. But all the apoſtles did perſevere. One indeed was a traitor:—and what became of him? At a time, when from man he had every thing to hope, and nothing to fear; his maſter being condemned, his former aſſociates diſperſed and terrified, and himſelf patronized by the rulers of Judea; this traitor was ſeized with remorſe, confeſſed that he had betrayed innocent blood, returned the wages of iniquity to thoſe from whom he had received it, and in deſpair 'departed, and went 'and hanged himſelf.' All this is natural and probable, on the ſuppoſition that the goſpel is true; on the contrary ſuppoſition, it is incredible and impoſſible.

SECTION II.

THE SUBJECT CONTINUED.

Of the argument from prophecy.

THE goſpel hiſtory is, in many particulars, an accompliſhment of certain prophecies, preſerved as ſacred by the Jews themſelves, and committed to writing ſeveral hundred years before our Saviour was born. That prophecy is poſſible, muſt be admitted by all who admit the poſſibility of other miracles, that is, by all who acknow-

acknowledge the power and omniſcience of the Deity. And that, in former times, and previouſly to the laſt and great manifeſtation of divine truth, prophecy and other miracles might have been expedient or neceſſary, though now they are ſo no longer, it would be very preſumptuous to deny.

In the hiſtory of the Old Teſtament it appears, that, from the earlieſt ages, an expectation had prevailed, among the Jews and their forefathers, that an extraordinary perſon, called by ſome of the prophets the Messiah, that is the Anointed, or the Christ, would at one time or other appear on earth, and bring about a very important change in the condition of the Jews, and of all other nations. The ancient

prophecies

prophecies that ſeem to relate to this Perſon, when taken ſeparately, may to a ſuperficial view appear to have leſs ſignificancy, than Chriſtians aſcribe to them. But he, who compares them together, and obſerves, how they refer to, and illuſtrate, and often imitate the language, and ſometimes copy the words, of one another, will be ſtruck with their conſiſtency and connection; and aſtoniſhed to find ſo many of them, notwithſtanding the variety, and apparent incongruity of the circumſtances foretold, ſo exactly fulfilled in the hiſtory of the birth, life, death, and religion of Jeſus of Nazareth.

Soon after the fall, it was foretold, of this Great Perſon *, that he ſhould

* Geneſis iii. 15. Gerard's Sermons, 4, 5, 6.

be

be in a peculiar ſenſe the ſon of a woman; that from the malignity of the devil he ſhould be a ſufferer, but that he ſhould bring deſtruction on that evil ſpirit. Two thouſand years after, it was foretold to Abraham, that this perſon ſhould be of the poſterity of Iſaac, and a bleſſing to all nations; and it was afterwards predicted, that he ſhould be of the tribe of Judah and family of David, and be born of a virgin in the town of Bethlehem. It was foretold, by the patriarch Iſrael, that, till he ſhould come, the Jewiſh government would not be ſubverted; and by the prophet Daniel the exact time of his death is foretold, as Mr. Ferguſon has proved in the moſt ſatisfactory manner. It was foretold, that this Meſſiah, this triumphant prince and Saviour, ſhould die a violent death,

as

as a malefactor, not for any ſin of his own, but for the ſins of mankind; and that ſoon after his death the city and temple of Jeruſalem would be deſtroyed: but, notwithſtanding this ignominious death, it was foretold, that his dominion ſhould be over all nations, and without end, that he ſhould ſpeak peace to the heathen, and introduce a new diſpenſation of things, tending to, and terminating in, peace and happineſs eternal.

It was foretold, that he ſhould preach good tidings to the poor, and perform many miracles for the alleviation of human infirmity; particularly, that he ſhould give ſight to the blind, ſpeech to the dumb, hearing to the deaf, and the perfect uſe of their limbs to the lame. It was foretold, that he ſhould

be

be ſold for thirty pieces of ſilver, and that with this money a potter's field ſhould be bought; that he ſhould be ſcourged, buffeted, and ſpit upon; that he ſhould be meek and ſilent before his accuſers; that his hands and feet ſhould be pierced, but that his bones ſhould not be broken; that gall and vinegar ſhould be offered him to drink; that lots ſhould be caſt for his garments; that he ſhould be buried in a rich man's ſepulchre; and that he ſhould riſe again without ſeeing corruption. How far theſe predictions were verified in Jeſus, no perſon needs be informed who has read the New Teſtament. And in him alone they were verified, and in no other man that ever appeared on the earth.

But are all theſe predictions applied with equal plainneſs by the prophets to the Meſſiah? They are not: ſome are more explicit and poſitive, others only inſinuated. And if we had no other evidence of the truth of our religion, I grant that this would not be ſo deciſive as it is. But, when we take a general view of the Old and New Teſtaments, and obſerve, that the one is, as it were, a completion of the other; and that the revelations recorded in both, though conſiſting of many parts, and delivered by different authors, and in different ages, have the ſame tendency, and the moſt perfect unity of deſign:—when we reflect, that theſe prophecies would mean nothing if they were not fulfilled in Jeſus, but that, as fulfilled in him, they have a moſt important meaning; and that the prophets, who uttered them,

them, predicted ſeveral other things that have come to paſs, particularly concerning Tyre and Egypt, Cyrus and Babylon, and the ſtate of the Jews after their diſperſion by the Romans:—and, which is ſtill more to the preſent purpoſe, when we find our Saviour and his apoſtles, whoſe veracity and ſupernatural knowledge we can prove *by other evidence*, appealing to theſe prophecies, and thereby juſtifying their doctrine and conduct, and thereby often ſilencing and converting Jews, who had ſtudied the prophets, and acknowledged their authenticity:—in a word, when we join this to the other proofs of our religion, we become ſenſible, that the argument from prophecy has a force in it, which cannot fail to make a ſtrong impreſſion on every candid and conſiderate mind. But let not

the adverſary triumph, though to him this argument ſhould not appear ſatisfactory: for the truth of our religion might be proved, though we were to omit this part of the evidence. Yet this has its uſe, in confirming the faith of the inquiſitive Chriſtian: and this has been ſingularly uſeful, in the converſion of the modern infidel, as well as of the ancient Jew. See Biſhop Burnet's account of the death of the Earl of Rocheſter.

THE better ſort of the ancient philoſophers admitted, that certain offices of good-will were due to all men. But univerſal benevolence, or a deſire to promote the virtue and happineſs of all men, ſeems not to have been prevalent either among them, or among the Jews. Love to one's country is celebrated by

the Greek and Roman writers as a ſublime virtue: but it was ſuch a love, as prompted men to nothing more, than to take care of the intereſts of their own community, with little or no concern for thoſe of other nations. In this reſpect the Jews were as narrow-minded as any people could be: they deſpiſed and hated all other nations; although the morality of Moſes and the prophets ought to have given them a more liberal way of thinking. Into the mind of a Jew, therefore, how could it enter, except by ſupernatural means, that the promiſed Prince and Meſſiah, from whom ſo many great things were expected in behalf of the Jewiſh nation, ſhould alſo be a 'light 'to lighten the Gentiles?' and that the influence of his power and benignity, as the deliverer of mankind,

ſhould be univerſal and eternal? This magnificent idea is familiar to us, becauſe we derive it from Holy Writ; but how remote it muſt have been from the minds of men unaided by revelation, may appear from this, that there is no trace of it in any pagan author;—except, perhaps, in the fourth eclogue of Virgil: and that poem is generally thought to have been compoſed from ſome fragments of ancient prophecy, probably of Iſaiah, which had come, we know not how, into the hands of the great Roman poet.

Of ſeveral other prophecies it would not be difficult to ſhew, that, conſidering the opinions and temper of the Jews, they are wholly unaccountable, unleſs we ſuppoſe them to have been the dictates of inſpiration. Such is

that memorable one of Zechariah, afterwards literally fulfilled in all its parts: 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter 'of Zion; ſhout, O daughter of Jeru-'ſalem; behold, thy king cometh unto 'thee: he is juſt, and having ſalva-'tion; lowly, and riding upon an aſs, 'and upon a colt, the foal of an aſs.' Was this likely to happen? Was it thus, that kings and conquerors uſed to enter their capital cities? Was it with this humble equipage that the Jews expected their glorious and triumphant Meſſiah would appear? Yet thus he did appear; infinitely more triumphant and glorious, than if he had been what they expected.

BEFORE I leave the ſubject of prophecy, let me ſubjoin a remark, which is perhaps too early introduced, but which,

which, when the veracity of the apoſtles ſhall have been evinced from other topics, will be found to have great weight in the argument. It is, that there are alſo, in the New Teſtament, predictions, which have been plainly accompliſhed. Such is our Lord's prophecy, that he ſhould be betrayed, delivered to the Gentiles, inſulted, and crucified, and ſhould riſe from the dead on the third day: events, which fell out accordingly; but of which, at the time he foretold them, one ſeemed to be impoſſible, and the others very improbable. And ſuch is that, which he ſo particularly delivered concerning Peter's momentary apoſtacy; a circumſtance which, conſidering the zeal, the generoſity, and the intrepidity of that apoſtle, was moſt unlikely, and which Peter himſelf, notwithſtanding his ve-

neration for his maſter, did not believe to be poſſible, till he found it had happened. I may add, that Peter's exemplary penitence, and ſubſequent conduct, when viewed in a connection with the peculiarity of his character, form a ſtriking proof, that his faith was equally well-founded and ſincere, and that he 'knew in whom he be-'lieved.'

THOSE other predictions, that have been ſuppoſed to allude to the church of Rome, or to the Mahometan impoſture, I do not touch upon; becauſe the world has not yet perhaps ſeen their completion. But that of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem muſt not be overlooked; as it was ſo ſoon and in ſo ſignal a manner verified; and as it related to an event, which, when our Saviour

Saviour foretold it, the Jews being then at peace with the Romans, and apparently reconciled to their yoke, no human wiſdom could have foreſeen. So great is the reſemblance between this prophecy and the calamities that followed, as theſe are recorded by Flavius Joſephus, who had the beſt opportunities of information, being himſelf preſent at the ſiege;—ſo like, I ſay, is the prediction to the event, that one would not be ſurpriſed, if the infidel were to ſuſpect, that the event muſt have been prior to the prediction. But it is ſomewhat remarkable, that Matthew, Mark, and Luke, who have recorded this prophecy, died before the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and that John, who ſurvived it, has not recorded the prophecy.

I SHALL firſt ſet down ſome parts of this prophecy, introduced with a prediction of Daniel; and ſecondly, I ſhall quote ſome paſſages from Joſephus, and one ſentence from Tacitus, relating to the events whereby thoſe predictions ſeem evidently to have been fulfilled.

'AFTER threeſcore and two weeks,' ſays Daniel, 'Meſſiah ſhall be cut off, '—and the people of the prince that 'ſhall come ſhall deſtroy the city and 'the ſanctuary; and the end thereof 'ſhall be with a flood, and unto the 'end of the war deſolations are deter-'mined.'

'SEEST thou theſe great buildings?' ſays our Saviour, ſpeaking of the temple. 'There ſhall not be left one ſtone 'upon

'upon another, that ſhall not be 'thrown down.—The days ſhall come 'upon thee (O Jeruſalem), when thine 'enemies ſhall caſt a trench about 'thee, and keep thee in on every ſide, 'and ſhall lay thee even with the 'ground, and ſhall not leave thee 'one ſtone upon another.—And great 'earthquakes ſhall be in divers places, 'and famines and peſtilences and fear-'ful ſights; and great ſigns ſhall there 'be from heaven.—There ſhall be 'great tribulation, ſuch as never hap-'pened from the beginning of the 'world to this time.—They ſhall fall 'by the edge of the ſword, and ſhall 'be led away captive into all nations: 'and Jeruſalem ſhall be trodden down 'of the Gentiles.—This generation 'ſhall not paſs, till all theſe things be 'fulfilled.'

THE

THE reader may compare this prophecy with the following extracts; the fifth of which is from Tacitus, the reſt from Joſephus.

1. 'TITUS commanded his ſoldiers 'to dig up the foundations of both the 'city and the temple.'

2. 'VESPASIAN'S army compaſſed 'the city round about with a wall of 'thirty-nine furlongs, having on it 'thirteen towers, and kept them in on 'every ſide; and ſo made it impoſſible 'for the Jews within the city to eſ-'cape.'

3. 'TITUS having commanded his 'ſoldiers to dig up the city, this was 'ſo completely done, by levelling the 'whole compaſs of it, except three 'towers,

'towers, that they who came to ſee it 'were perſuaded it could never be built 'again.'

4. 'In the times of Claudius and 'Nero,' (a few years before the deſtruction of Jeruſalem,) 'there happened in Judea a prodigious tempeſt, 'and vehement winds with rain, and 'dreadful lightning and thunder, and 'roarings of the trembling earth.'

5. 'Armies ſeemed to encounter, 'and weapons to glitter, in the ſky; 'the temple ſeemed to blaze with fire 'iſſuing from the clouds; and a voice 'more than human was heard, declaring, that the deities were quitting the 'place, which was attended with the 'ſound of a great motion, as of perſons going away.'

6. 'The

6. 'THE great gate of the temple' (which twenty men could ſcarcely ſhut, and which was ſecured by bolts and bars) 'was ſeen to open of its own 'accord: a ſword appeared hanging 'over the city: a comet was ſeen point-'ing down upon it for a whole year 'together. Before the ſun went down, 'there appeared armies in battle-array, 'and chariots compaſſing the country, 'and inveſting the cities: a thing ſo 'ſtrange, that it would paſs for a fable, 'were there not men living to atteſt 'it.'

7. 'NEVER was any nation more 'wicked, nor ever did a city ſuffer as 'they did.—All the miſeries that man-'kind had ſuffered from the beginning 'of the world were not to be compared 'with thoſe that the Jewiſh nation did 'then

'then ſuffer. The number of captives 'was ninety-ſeven thouſand. Titus 'ſent many to Egypt, and moſt of 'them he diſperſed into the Roman 'provinces *.'

In Jeruſalem, during the ſiege, there periſhed by famine, diſeaſe, and the ſword, ſix hundred thouſand, according to Suetonius; eleven hundred thouſand, according to Joſephus and Jornandes. And not long after, a general perſecution of the Jews took place throughout the Roman empire.—All theſe things came to paſs within the ſpace of forty years after the death of our Saviour; ſo that the generation,

* See Whitby, quoted by Weſt, in his Obſervations on the hiſtory and evidences of the reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt; p. 380. edit. 5.

which

which was on earth when he uttered this memorable prophecy, had not paſſed away, when it was in all its parts accompliſhed.

THIS extraordinary revolution has had conſequences not leſs extraordinary. Ever ſince the period I ſpeak of, the Jews have been diſperſed through all nations, without obtaining a regular eſtabliſhment in any; have been generally deſpiſed wherever they went; have been without a king, without a prince, and without a ſacrifice: and yet have not loſt their religion, nor been incorporated with the Gentiles among whom they wander: but ſtill remain a diſtinct people. Has ſuch been the fate of any other nation? Could this, then, have been foreſeen or foretold, except by ſupernatural means?

mean? Yet of them this was foretold by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hoſea, and Moſes. Indeed the whole hiſtory of this people, before their diſperſion by Titus and ſince, bears irrefragable teſtimony to the truth of both the Old Teſtament and the New. See Addiſon's remarks on it, in the four hundred and ninety-fifth paper of the *Spectator**.—So much for prophecy. The argument ariſing from the excellency, and ſingular nature, of the Chriſtian doctrine, will be conſidered by and by.

* See alſo Butler's Analogy, part ii. chap. 7.

SECTION. III.

THE SUBJECT CONTINUED.

The faith of the firſt diſciples was the effect, not of weakneſs, but of well-grounded conviction.

THE hiſtorical part of the New Teſtament was written by men, who were eye-witneſſes of many of the facts they relate, and had the reſt from the authentic information of eye-witneſſes. Thoſe men either DID NOT BELIEVE what they wrote, or DID BELIEVE IT.

I. IF they did not believe what they wrote, they were impoſtors, and wanted to deceive the world. Now men never

never form a plan of that nature, unleſs with a view to gain ſome end; that is, to obtain ſome good, real or imaginary. For it is inconceivable, that a rational being ſhould give himſelf the trouble to invent an impoſture, and ſupport it through life; a work of great difficulty, and in a caſe like that before us, of the greateſt danger; in order to draw down miſchief upon himſelf: and it is not more probable, that he ſhould do all this by chance, and without any purpoſe or intention whatever. When Pſalmanaazar forged his fable of the iſland Formoſa, can we imagine that he had no meaning in it, or that by ſo doing he intended to hurt his own intereſt? Is it not more likely, that he hoped to make his fortune by it? What then was the motive, that could induce the apoſtles to deceive

mankind? what fortune did they hope to make? what good, real or imaginary, could they have in view, if they were conſcious, that what they affirmed was falſehood?

CERTAIN it is, that, when their Lord left them, they could no longer expect to advance their temporal intereſt, by adhering to his cauſe. On the contrary, they were told from the firſt, and, after his death, they knew and believed, that perſecution and martyrdom would be their lot in this world; and, as their Jewiſh education muſt have taught them that God is juſt and holy, they, knowing themſelves to be deceivers, could entertain no hope with reſpect to the next. And this muſt equally have been the ſtate of their mind, whether with the Pha-

riſees they believed a future life, or with the Sadducees denied it. Surely, the certain proſpect of perſecution here, with no hope of reward, or with the apprehenſion of puniſhment, hereafter, can never be the motive that tempts men to falſify. Preſent gain might tempt the covetous, preſent power the ambitious, or preſent pleaſure the ſenſual; and a deluſive hope of future pleaſure or power might tempt the enthuſiaſt. But, where none of theſe temptations exiſted; and, with reſpect to the apoſtles, it is certain that none of them did or could exiſt; what was there in nature, or in the human imagination, that could induce them to encounter a life of pain and poverty, perſecution and ſcorn, in ſupport of a lie? All the impoſtures that ever appeared on earth aimed at the acquiſi-

tion of temporal advantages, of pleaſure, wealth, or power: and indeed it is hard to conceive, what other motives could induce a rational being to become an impoſtor. And, with theſe allurements in their eye, we too often find that men can harden themſelves, for a time at leaſt, againſt the terrors of a life to come.

WILL it be ſaid, that the apoſtles intended, by an impoſture, merely to diſtinguiſh themſelves, and acquire fame? This could not be their intention. All their doctrines have a tendency to raiſe the mind above the preſent world, and make it ſuperior to every conſideration of that ſort. The love of fame is not that univerſal paſſion which Dr. Young ſuppoſes it to be. They who have converſed with many

many people, of different conditions and characters, muſt have found, that the greater part of mankind have no idea of ſuch a paſſion. Nor is the love of diſtinction ſo ſtrong in any breaſt, as to make a man expoſe himſelf knowingly to perdition and infamy in order to obtain it. Let it be obſerved too, that the firſt apoſtles were men of mean condition, mean education, and mean employment, and moſt of them conſiderably advanced in years. In the minds of ſuch men we never ſee the love of fame predominant; though in ſuch minds we often ſee the love of a fair character prevail, which, however, moſt men know is not to be acquired by diſhoneſty and falſehood.

When men reſolve to ſet an impoſture on foot, they muſt have ſome rea-

ſon to expect ſucceſs in it: becauſe a detection is in all caſes dangerous, and may in many be fatal. The juggler knows that his audience are credulous, and more willing to wonder than to inquire: he knows too, that ſome of them are his confederates, and that far the greater number are ready to take his part againſt thoſe, who by their impertinent curioſity or unbelief may be inclined to interrupt the entertainment. Pſalmanaazar was in no danger of detection: his iſland being little known, and at a great diſtance. He contrived a probable tale; and, to make it the more probable, he did what he knew nobody would ſuſpect him of having done, becauſe no one man had ever done ſo before,—he invented a new language. In fact, though at firſt ſome doubted, he was never detected; his

his fable obtained credit for more than half a century; and it was his own voluntary confeſſion, the effect of ſincere though late repentance, that let the world into the ſecret.

Now ſuppoſe a few illiterate fiſhermen to contrive a new religion, different from all others; and endeavour to obtrude it on mankind, in oppoſition to the temporal intereſts of their immediate rulers, and to all the prejudices, the paſſions, the power, the learning, the philoſophy, and the eloquence, of an enlightened and inquiſitive age; what chance would they have to ſucceed in the impoſture? How is it poſſible that they ſhould entertain any hope of ſucceſs at all? The thing is impoſſible. And therefore the apoſtles muſt have certainly known, that their

religion was from heaven, and would be ſupported by ſupernatural means; —which actually happened to be the caſe. For on no other ſuppoſition can the extraordinary ſucceſs of their miniſtry be accounted for.

A DISPOSITION to falſify and deceive is a criminal paſſion, that never appears ſingle or ſolitary in the mind. Other evil paſſions never fail to accompany this; for where the love of truth is not, virtue cannot be. But the apoſtles, after their converſion, were patterns of every virtue; of humility, patience, benevolence, piety, and the moſt amiable ſimplicity of manners: virtues, which never did, and never can, meet in the character of a deceiver. Lying makes a man infamous; which it would not do, if the

the world did not know by the experience of all ages, that from him who is inclined to that practice no good is to be expected.—I may add, that the virtues above mentioned, exemplified as they uniformly were in all the apoſtles, muſt have been the effect, not ſo much of natural diſpoſition, for the apoſtles were in other reſpects of different characters, as of that divine grace and truth, with which they were equally and uniformly enlightened.

The firſt preachers of the goſpel taught men to ſubdue all irregular deſires of pleaſure, wealth, and power, and to ſuppreſs every tendency of the heart to pride, vanity, and vain-glory. Had they themſelves been actuated by ſuch deſires or tendencies, their conduct muſt have belied their doctrine. But

no

no two things can be more conſiſtent, than the doctrine and practice of the apoſtles: they taught what they practiſed, they practiſed what they taught; and through life, and at death, their whole behaviour was uniform.

By what they taught they could never hope to make themſelves popular, either in the higher or in the lower ranks of life; for they flattered no human vice, but abſolutely prohibited all. Among the vulgar they met with no little oppoſition, from prejudice, want of ſenſe, and brutal manners. From the learned, of their own or of other countries, they could expect no indulgence: becauſe the religion they introduced was in moſt things directly oppoſite to the ſpirit of pagan philoſophy, as well as to the tenets and temper

temper of the Jewiſh ſectaries. And from the Roman emperors, who in thoſe days might be called the ſovereigns of the world, what but perſecution could that man look for, who was to deny their deification, and refuſe to pay them divine honours: a prerogative, whereof thoſe proud potentates too well knew the value to permit it to be wreſted from them with impunity; but which, however, was at laſt, though not with impunity, wreſted from them, in conſequence of the preaching of a few unlettered fiſhermen from Judea.

THOUGH the apoſtles did not, as ſome enthuſiaſts have done, provoke perſecution, but exerted on all proper occaſions a becoming prudence, yet ſelf-

ſelf-intereſt cannot be ſaid to have determined their conduct in a ſingle inſtance. On the contrary, nothing is more evident, from their hiſtory and writings, than that, after the commencement of their miniſtry, the buſineſs of their lives was, to promote the glory of God, and make men ſuperiour both to the adverſities and proſperities of this life, and happy in that which is to come. And this they did, not by recommending, like the Stoicks, an unnatural and impracticable inſenſibility, or a ſtern reſolution to ſubmit to that which cannot be reſiſted; but by teaching, that the evils incident to this ſtate of trial are all intended, by the merciful Father of mankind, as paternal admonitions, or as opportunities of calling forth and exerciſing thoſe virtues,

virtues, which are neceſſary to prepare us for the enjoyment of future reward.

And let it not be forgotten, that they had been educated in the principles and prejudices of the Jews; a nation at that time univerſally deſpiſed, and, if we admit the teſtimony of their countryman Joſephus, as wicked as any that ever was on the earth; in ſpite of the advantages they ought to have derived from Moſes, and their other moraliſts and prophets. The virtue of the Roman people was not in thoſe days exemplary. Yet, when we compare their manners, as they occaſionally appear in the ſacred hiſtory, with thoſe of the Jews, how are we ſtruck with the difference!

THE Romans are indeed pagans; but they are not deſtitute of that good-nature and love of juſtice, which one expects to find in a civilized nation; the Jews are ſeldom ſeen in any other character than that of bloody barbarians. Pontius Pilate avowed our Lord's innocence, and ſhewed an inclination to ſave his life: Gallio, proconſul of Achaia, acted with good ſenſe and moderation, when Paul was brought before him *; Claudius Lyſias, Feſtus, and Felix, in their treatment of the ſame apoſtle, were not unmercifully ſevere; and the centurion, whoſe priſoner he was in his voyage to Italy, was very much attached to him. But the Jewiſh prieſts, ſcribes, and elders,

* See Diſquiſitions concerning the Antiquities of the Chriſtian church, chap. i.

conſpired

conſpired to murder our Saviour without a trial, ſuborned perſons to bear falſe witneſs againſt him, and bribed one of his followers to betray him; and the ſame aſſembly, or their ſucceſſors in office, connived at a ſcheme, and of courſe concurred in it, for the aſſaſſination of Paul. In a word, it appears, that the greater part, and what we call the better ſort, of the Jews of that age, when they had reſolved on any meaſure, would not heſitate to employ any means, however unjuſt, cruel, or ſhameful, in the accompliſhment of it. That a nation ſo utterly profligate ſhould have at the ſame time produced twelve men of ſuch exalted piety, generous benevolence, and morals ſo refined and ſo perfect, as Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles, is almoſt as great a miracle, by the acknow-

acknowledgment of Rouſſeau himſelf (who is not partial to the ſacred writers), as any that ſtands on record. There muſt have been ſomething extraordinary in the cauſe, that could in theſe circumſtances produce characters ſo tranſcendently excellent.

Of our Lord's diſciples, previouſly to their converſion, we know little; but this we know, that they ſoon after became preachers and patterns of righteouſneſs. How is it poſſible that this ſhould have been the effect of their engaging in an impoſture? Can the continued practice of hypocriſy and lying improve and purify the heart? The age wherein they lived, being more enlightened than any that had gone before it, and beyond meaſure addicted to diſputation and inquiry, was a moſt unfavour-

unfavourable period for the introduction of any publick fraud. In all that part of the world the arms of Rome had eſtabliſhed her policy, the exactneſs whereof is well known; and the Greek learning, univerſally ſtudied by the Romans, was likely to be carried into every country that was ſubject to their power.

It deſerves particular notice, that, till after the death of their maſter, the apoſtles were never cured of the national miſtake, that the Meſſiah was to be a great temporal prince, and to make the Jews the moſt powerful people in the world. Accordingly we find, that, immediately after his crucifixion, they were greatly diſconcerted, and at a loſs what to think of him. 'We truſted,' ſaid they, 'that it had been he who

'ſhould have redeemed Iſrael*.' At that time, it ſeems, the croſs was a ſtumbling-block to them, as well as to others. And no wonder, conſidering the hopes they had formed, and the ſad diſappointment occaſioned by an event, which, though he had plainly foretold it, they were ſo unwilling to believe, as to flatter themſelves it could not happen. In this ſtate of confuſion and trouble, if they had entertained any ſuſpicion of impoſture, nay, if they had not been certain that there was no impoſture, might they not, with a very good grace, and is it not probable that they would, have returned to their buſineſs and their firſt religion, ſaying, This was not the man whom we believed him to be? And as, for reaſons

* See the laſt chapter of St. Luke.

already

already given, nothing could have been more agreeable to their rulers, than ſuch a declaration from ſuch perſons, it muſt undoubtedly have promoted their temporal intereſt. But their adherence to their Lord, and his cauſe, in circumſtances ſo very extraordinary, is a proof that they knew they did right; and were thoroughly ſatisfied, that the ſupernatural knowledge, which they received about this time from himſelf, after his reſurrection, and at the deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt, was really from heaven.

THE reader will be pleaſed to beſtow a ſecond thought on this argument. Let us for a moment take for granted what is plainly abſurd, and ſuppoſe it poſſible, that the apoſtles, during the *life* of their maſter, might

have been impoſed on; that the miracles they ſaw him perform were not real but fictitious; that the divine ſanctity of his manners was aſſumed, and not genuine; and that the excellency of his doctrine, the authority that accompanied all his words, and the veneration which his preſence inſpired, were the effect of mere human eloquence and addreſs: yet ſurely his *death*, if it had put an end to his being, would have at laſt opened their eyes, and ſatisfied them, that he was not what he had declared himſelf to be. With this perſuaſion, which on the preſent ſuppoſition they muſt have had, they, in affirming that he was riſen from the dead, and in continuing to teach what he had taught, muſt have known themſelves to be impoſtors. What then could be their motive to perſiſt

in

in a lie? That which could be no motive at all: the certain proſpect of perſecution, and death, (for how could they imagine it would fare better with them, than it had fared with their Maſter?) without any advantage whatever to counterbalance thoſe evils. And what would have been their motives to return to their Jewiſh profeſſion, and acknowledge they had been impoſed on? The ſtrongeſt that can influence human nature: firſt, that indignation, which would be natural in men, who had forſaken all to follow a perſon whom they now found to have deluded them into a very dangerous ſnare; ſecondly, the hope of advancing their intereſt, by doing that which, for reaſons already given, muſt have gratified their rulers in the high-

eſt degree; and, thirdly, the conſciouſneſs of having, as became honeſt men, performed a duty, which they owed to themſelves, their religion, and their country. In fact, if they were endowed with any ſhare of underſtanding or of ſpirit, nay, if they were not both idiots and madmen, it is not poſſible to account for their conduct on any other ſuppoſition than this, that their teſtimony is true. The man muſt be credulous indeed, as well as ignorant of human nature, who can heſitate to admit this concluſion;—unleſs he choſe to reject the New Teſtament hiſtory altogether. And, if he do that, let him account for the exiſtence of the Chriſtian religion, if he can. And let him no more pretend, that credit is due to ancient records.

WHEN

When we compare the four goſpels with one another, we ſee nothing like colluſion in the authors, but we may ſee very plain evidence that there is no colluſion. They do not all relate the ſame things, nor in exactly the ſame manner: nor does any one of their books ſeem intended as an apology for any other, or as a comment upon it. In the ſtyle of each there are peculiarities, more obſervable indeed in the original Greek than in any tranſlation; but the ſame unaffected ſimplicity prevails through all. Their teſtimonies differ not in any thing material; and yet they differ as much as is uſually expected in witneſſes, ſeparately examined, and giving a candid account of what they had ſeen and heard. A perfect co-incidence, where teſtimonies conſiſt of many particulars,

would breed ſuſpicion of a pre-concerted plan: a few ſlight variations, in matters of little moment, would in moſt caſes impreſs a perſuaſion of the integrity of witneſſes. If in this manner we judge of the veracity of one another, and if the common ſenſe of mankind warrants the judgment, and their experience, after long trial, finds no flaw in it, why ſhould we argue from different principles, in judging of the veracity of the evangeliſts?

LAYING all theſe things together, every perſon who underſtands human nature, and has read the New Teſtament with care, and with that humility and teachableneſs, that form as it were the groundwork of Chriſtian faith, muſt be ſatisfied, that the apoſtles were no impoſtors, but believed ſincerely

cerely what they taught:—which, indeed, to a man of taſte would appear, as obſerved already, from the ſimple and artleſs manner in which they tell their ſtory, deliver their doctrine, and record their own faults, miſtakes, and follies.

II. It appears then, that they believed what they taught, and what they recorded. And if ſo, their faith muſt have been the effect, either of WEAKNESS, or of WELL-GROUNDED CONVICTION.

Of weakneſs it could not be the effect. Such of their doctrines as are level to human capacity appear to be agreeable to the pureſt truth, and the ſoundeſt morality. All the genius and learning of the heathen world; all the penetration of Pythagoras, Socrates, and

and Ariſtotle, had never been able to produce ſuch a ſyſtem of moral duty, and ſo rational an account of Providence and of man, as is to be found in the New Teſtament. Compared, indeed, to this, all other moral and theological wiſdom

Loſes diſcountenanced, and like folly ſhows.

Was the great apoſtle of the Gentiles a weak man; he who ſpoke and wrote with ſuch energy and addreſs, and whoſe eloquence made a Roman proconſul tremble? Were thoſe weak men, who taught a ſyſtem of opinions, which even the ſovereigns of the world, and ſome of the leaſt cruel, the moſt learned, and the moſt politick of them too, thought it their intereſt to bear down and deſtroy, not with argument,

in

in which it would appear they had no confidence, but with fire and ſword? Were thoſe weak men, who, in defiance of perſecution, and in oppoſition to all the power, policy, and learning, of the Roman empire, brought in, though unarmed and defenceleſs, a new religion, which continues to this day; is gradually extending itſelf over the earth more and more; and by the ſtill ſmall voice of reaſon daily puts to ſilence, or confutes at leaſt, its moſt cunning and moſt inveterate adverſaries? Were thoſe weak men, who taught that, which has given wiſdom and happineſs to millions of mankind, and has without violence introduced into the manners and policy of a great part of the world changes the moſt important and beneficial, and likely to be as durable as the world itſelf?

Could

Could thoſe, in fine, be weak men, whom the moſt inquiſitive and moſt enlightened minds that have been on earth ſince their time, whom Bacon and Grotius, whom Newton and Boyle, whom Hooker, Clarke, Butler, and Stillingfleet, whom Milton, Clarendon, Addiſon, Arbuthnot, and Lyttelton, have held in the higheſt veneration, as not only wiſe, but inſpired? Either, then, let the infidel admit, that the publiſhers of Chriſtianity were not weak men; or let him prove, that the great perſons now mentioned were deſtitute of underſtanding, or at leaſt in that reſpect inferiour to himſelf.

In the ſciences it has often happened, that, from ignorance of nature, men of great abilities have been led into error, which accidental diſcovery, or

or more accurate obſervation, has enabled ſucceeding inquirers to rectify. But no modern diſcoveries invalidate in the ſmalleſt degree the proofs of our religion. There is nothing in the philoſophy of evidence that correſponds to teleſcopes or microſcopes, to electricity or magnetiſm. Men judge of that matter now, as they did formerly. Credible teſtimony and their ſenſes they believed from the beginning, and they do ſo ſtill. Nor has it yet been found out, that any miracle recorded in the Goſpel is impoſſible to divine power, or any doctrine there taught unworthy of divine wiſdom. Every new diſcovery in the viſible univerſe exalts, when rightly underſtood, our ideas of the goodneſs and greatneſs of the Creator, and ought, conſequently, to cheriſh that love and fear of him, which the

whole tenor of revelation commands us to cultivate. And every late improvement in criticism and the knowledge of antiquity is found, when applied to the sacred writings, to throw light upon them, and, by so doing, to confirm the history, and recommend the doctrine. The progress of science, therefore, whereby in so many other respects the opinions of the ancients have been confuted or rectified, seems to confirm what the apostles taught concerning the religion of Jesus, by proving its permanency and unalterable nature.

GRANTING then, that the modern infidel, profiting by the discoveries of latter times, may be better informed in the sciences than the primitive Christians were; it will not follow that he, or that the acutest of our philosophers,

loſophers, can be a better judge of the leading evidences of Chriſtianity. It is true, that in ſome things we are not ſo credulous, as the world muſt have been while philoſophy and hiſtory were little known; and that of courſe we are more ſcrupulous in the examination of ſome ſorts of evidence. But, in regard to the miracles, whereof the apoſtles were eye-witneſſes, which they recorded in their writings, in the belief of which they lived and died, and moſt of which their enemies of that time did not deny, they were as little liable to be impoſed on, as if each of them had poſſeſſed the learning of Grotius, with the penetration of Newton. For ſuch was the nature of thoſe miracles, that, to make an attentive ſpectator a competent judge of them, neither learning nor genius was neceſſary;

ceſſary; nor any other talent or accompliſhment, but a ſound mind, an honeſt heart, and the right uſe of one's ſenſes.

They ſaw men, whom they and all the country knew to have been blind from their birth, made to ſee in an inſtant, without the application of any inſtrument or medicine: they ſaw leproſy, palſy, and other obſtinate diſeaſes, removed in the ſame manner, by barely ſpeaking a word: they ſaw the dead raiſed to life, yea raiſed even from the grave: they ſaw a man's ear cut off by the ſword of Peter, and the wound immediately healed with a touch: they ſaw water converted into wine in the preſence of many perſons, who drank of it, and were ſatisfied that the transformation was real: they them-

themſelves were part of a multitude of five thouſand, whoſe hunger was allayed by a few loaves and fiſhes, when more fragments were left than there had been food at firſt: they ſaw their Maſter walk on the ſurface of the ſea; and they were preſent, when at his command a ſtorm was changed into a calm.

By the inſtantaneous operation of the ſame divine word, they frequently ſaw human bodies ſet free from the tyranny of demons: for that God, in order to manifeſt the ſupremacy of his Son over the powers of darkneſs, as well as over the viſible univerſe, might, at that time, and in that country, permit evil ſpirits to moleſt mankind more than uſual, will not be affirmed to be either impoſſible or improbable, by

thoſe who acknowledge the poſſibility of revelation. Or if we ſuppoſe the diſtemper to have been no other than madneſs, or than epilepſy (which however the general tenor of the hiſtory will hardly permit us to ſuppoſe), the cure muſt ſtill be allowed to be miraculous. For to remove theſe diſeaſes by ſpeaking a word, and to expel a demon, are equally beyond the reach of human power, and equally eaſy to that which is divine.

THE apoſtles heard their Maſter foretel ſeveral events, particularly his crucifixion and reſurrection, and they ſaw that, as well as ſome of his other prophecies, accompliſhed. They ſaw him publickly crucified, pierced with a ſpear, and buried. They ſaw the prodigies that accompanied his laſt ſuffering;

fering; at leaſt they muſt have ſeen the preternatural darkneſs, and felt the earthquake; and the rending of the veil of the temple they would not have mentioned, if they had not known that it was ſo. Three days after, according to his prediction, they ſaw him alive again; converſed with him, ate and probably drank with him, felt his body to be a real material body, felt even the ſcars of his wounds, ſaw him frequently during the ſpace of forty days; and finally, were ſtanding by him, and receiving his benediction, when in open day they ſaw him aſcend towards heaven, following him with their eyes till a cloud received him out of their ſight.

These are facts, in regard to which they could not be miſtaken, though

they had been the moſt credulous of mankind. But credulous they were not: ſome of them, on the contrary, ſeem to have been unreaſonably ſceptical. Indeed, if we allow them to have had common underſtanding, which no perſon who knows their ſtory will deny, we muſt ſuppoſe, that they would not raſhly, or without full conviction, engage in a cauſe, which in a temporal view was likely to coſt them ſo dear. They were, it is true, unlettered men: but the propriety of their conduct, the wiſdom of their doctrine, and the ſucceſs of their miniſtry, are ſo much the clearer proofs of their inſpiration.

One of them, a man of learning and uncommon abilities, a zealous Jew and an unrelenting perſecutor of Chriſtians,

ians, in the midſt of his ſanguinary career, while he 'verily thought with 'himſelf' that the cauſe he had engaged in was acceptable to God, and beneficial to his country;—while, by adhering to it, he ſeemed to have every thing to hope that could gratify his ambition, and while, by revolting from it in the way he did, he had every temporal inconvenience to fear that can intimidate human nature:—this man, I ſay, while in theſe circumſtances, and charged with a publick commiſſion which he himſelf had ſolicited from the high prieſt, and at the head of a train of attendants, was, together with them, at noonday, ſtruck to the earth by an extraordinary light from heaven; in conſequence of which he became a Chriſtian, declaring that he had been

warned by a ſupernatural voice; renounced for ever all worldly purſuits, and cheerfully ſubmitted to poverty, perſecution, and death, for the religion of Jeſus.

WHAT could be his motive? Was it a regard to duty, founded on his knowledge, and his love, of the truth? Then is his conduct eaſily accounted for; and his reſignation to the many evils he had to ſuffer was the affect of that ſupport, which pious men receive, from the approbation of their own mind, the hope of future reward, and the enlivening influence of divine grace. From any other principle is it poſſible to account rationally for his conduct? Was it from luſt of fame, the deſire of pleaſure or of power, or in order to better his fortune, that this man,

man, with a mind elevated by genius, and enlightened by learning, choſe to deſcend, with certain, imminent, and dreadful danger to himſelf, from a high and honourable ſtation,—that he might become the aſſociate of a few poor, deſpiſed, perſecuted, and illiterate fiſhermen, among whom he never aſſumed any ſuperiority, and whoſe Maſter had lately been put to an ignominious death as a malefactor, not only of the worſt kind, but alſo of the meaneſt condition?

In a word, Paul either was, or was not, an impoſtor. If he was an impoſtor, he muſt have been a very ſingular one indeed. For, inſtead of aiming at riches, honour, pleaſure, or power (and at one, or other, or all of theſe, all other impoſtors have aim-

ed), his hopes and purpoſes muſt in every reſpect have had a contrary direction. He muſt have preferred contempt to honour, impriſonment to liberty, danger to ſecurity, and ſcourging, ſtoning, hunger, nakedneſs *, and martyrdom (for they were all before him, and he underwent them all without a murmur,) to a life of eaſe and affluence. And, finally, being a ſtrict Phariſee, and conſequently believing a future ſtate, he muſt, without any temporal allurement whatever, have preferred damnation to happineſs in the world to come. But could he thus, in every ſenſe of the word, prefer miſery to its oppoſite? If he could, he was a madman:—which his writings and hiſtory prove he was not.

* 2 Cor. xi. 27. 1 Cor. iv. 11, 12, 13.

If he was no impoſtor, he muſt have been an honeſt man: and, that being admitted, we muſt alſo admit what he teſtifies concerning the manner and conſequences of his converſion; in other words, we muſt believe the goſpel to be true. And if he was the author of thoſe epiſtles, which ever ſince they were written have borne his name; and if he taught thoſe doctrines, which the phyſician Luke, his fellow-traveller, heard from his mouth, and has recorded; he muſt have been no frantick or weak enthuſiaſt, but a perſon of good underſtanding, of exemplary virtue, and of the higheſt attainments in true wiſdom;—in that wiſdom, I mean, 'which 'is from above,' and which tends to purify our nature, and make us happy, both now and for ever. The thirteenth

teenth chapter of his firſt epiſtle to the Corinthians would alone prove him to have been one of the beſt and wiſeſt men that ever lived.

I SAID, that Paul, if he was not an impoſtor, muſt have been an honeſt man: and, this being admitted, that the goſpel muſt be true. If indeed it could be ſhewn, that he was credulous, and that before his converſion he had entertained any partiality to the doctrines and character of Jeſus, it might ſeem poſſible at leaſt, though no doubt very improbable, that his paſſions and imagination might have diſordered his judgment, and perverted his ſenſes; and, therefore, that the circumſtances of his converſion, though believed by him to be real, might have been viſionary.

viſionary. Well: was he a credulous man? or had he any partiality of this kind?

So far was he from being credulous, that all he had heard of our Lord's miracles (for he muſt have heard of them, and from eye-witneſſes too), had no weight with him; and nothing could overcome his incredulity, but a miracle wrought upon himſelf: — wrought, not in darkneſs or in ſolitude, or at a time when any thing had happened to enfeeble or depreſs his mind, but at noon-day, in the publick highway, in the midſt of his adherents, in the neighbourhood of a great town, and while he himſelf was employed, as he firmly believed, in the ſervice of God, and of his country. And ſo far was he from entertaining any partiality to the Chriſtian

Chriſtian cauſe, that, till this miracle was wrought for his converſion, he looked upon Jeſus as an impoſtor and blaſphemer, and upon the diſciples, as a ſet of men, whom it was in the higheſt degree meritorious to perſecute and deſtroy.

In ſome of his epiſtles, addreſſed to churches he had planted, we find him declaring, as a thing which they knew to be true, that he was endowed with the power of working miracles, and had actually wrought many. If the fact had been otherwiſe, would he have hazarded ſuch a declaration, in writing to a people, among whom he knew he had perſonal oppoſers, and whom he was reproving for ſeveral irregularities*? And if the fact was ſo,—if he

* See Butler's Analogy, part ii. chap. 7.

really

really was a worker of miracles, as well as a preacher of the pureſt and ſublimeſt morality, muſt we not conſider him, as in a very peculiar manner, and in a very high degree, favoured by that Being, who is the giver of every good and of every perfect gift? They who believe in God, and candidly weigh all theſe circumſtances, will not object to St. Paul's veracity. And if that which he teſtifies concerning himſelf be true, it is abſolutely impoſſible that the goſpel can be falſe.

INDEED, the converſion of this great man, and his conduct both before and after he became an apoſtle, do alone amount to ſuch a proof of our religion, as cannot be overthrown;—in any other way, than by proving the *Acts of the Apoſtles*, and the ſubſequent *Epiſtles*, to

to be fiction and forgery. The reader will find a full, an elegant, and, I think, an unanſwerable illuſtration of this argument, in Lord Lyttelton's *Remarks on the Converſion of St. Paul.*

And now, to conclude this part of the ſubject,—Let them, who are acquainted with the hiſtory of our Saviour, attend to it ever ſo ſlightly, and then ſay, what regard is due to the judgment of thoſe, who talk of electricity and magnetiſm as principles in nature capable of exalting the man who underſtands them into a worker of miracles. Will magnetiſm or electricity, or any other natural principle that can be mentioned, enable the perſon who is ſkilled in it to raiſe himſelf or others from the dead; to cure diſeaſes by ſpeaking a word; to foretel future

future events; to make a few loaves and fiſhes a ſufficient meal for five thouſand men; to publiſh a ſyſtem of morality more perfect than any other that ever was in the world; to impart to other men the power of working miracles, and particularly, of ſpeaking languages they had never learned? We have heard of making the agitation of water ſubſide by pouring oil on it: Plutarch mentions this as a well-known fact, quotes Ariſtotle's reaſon for it, and gives another of his own *; and of late it is ſaid to have been proved by experiment; but who will undertake to calm the ſea by uttering a word!

They who compare the meekneſs and benevolence, the candour and mo-

* Plut. Nat. Quæſt. 12.

deſty,

deſty, the power and the dignity, of our Saviour, with the craft, ſecrecy, and oſtentation, of a juggler, (one trembles even to think of the compariſon,) and find no material difference between the mighty works of the one and the petty tricks of the other, are far beyond the reach of argument, and muſt, on this ſubject at leaſt, be abſolutely irrational. As well might they ſay, that the juggler, becauſe he can ſhift a card, or manage an eaſy calculation, muſt have the command of nature, and the power of changing death into life. The clown, who ſhould ſay ſo, would be laughed at for his credulity and ignorance. What then ſhall we think of the philoſopher, who, in his judgment of our Saviour's miracles, ſhows himſelf equally ignorant and credulous?

LASTLY; the apoſtles found themſelves endowed, agreeably to their Lord's prediction, with the power of working ſuch miracles as he had wrought. They ſaw the lame walk, the living drop down dead, and the dead ariſe to life, at their command. They felt themſelves on a ſudden enabled to ſpeak a variety of languages they had never learned; a talent which, in the courſe of their miniſtry, they muſt have had frequent occaſion to exerciſe. In this is it probable, is it poſſible, that they could be miſtaken?

THEIR faith, therefore, was the effect, not of WEAKNESS, but of WELL-GROUNDED CONVICTION. CONSEQUENTLY THEIR TESTIMONY IS TRUE.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.